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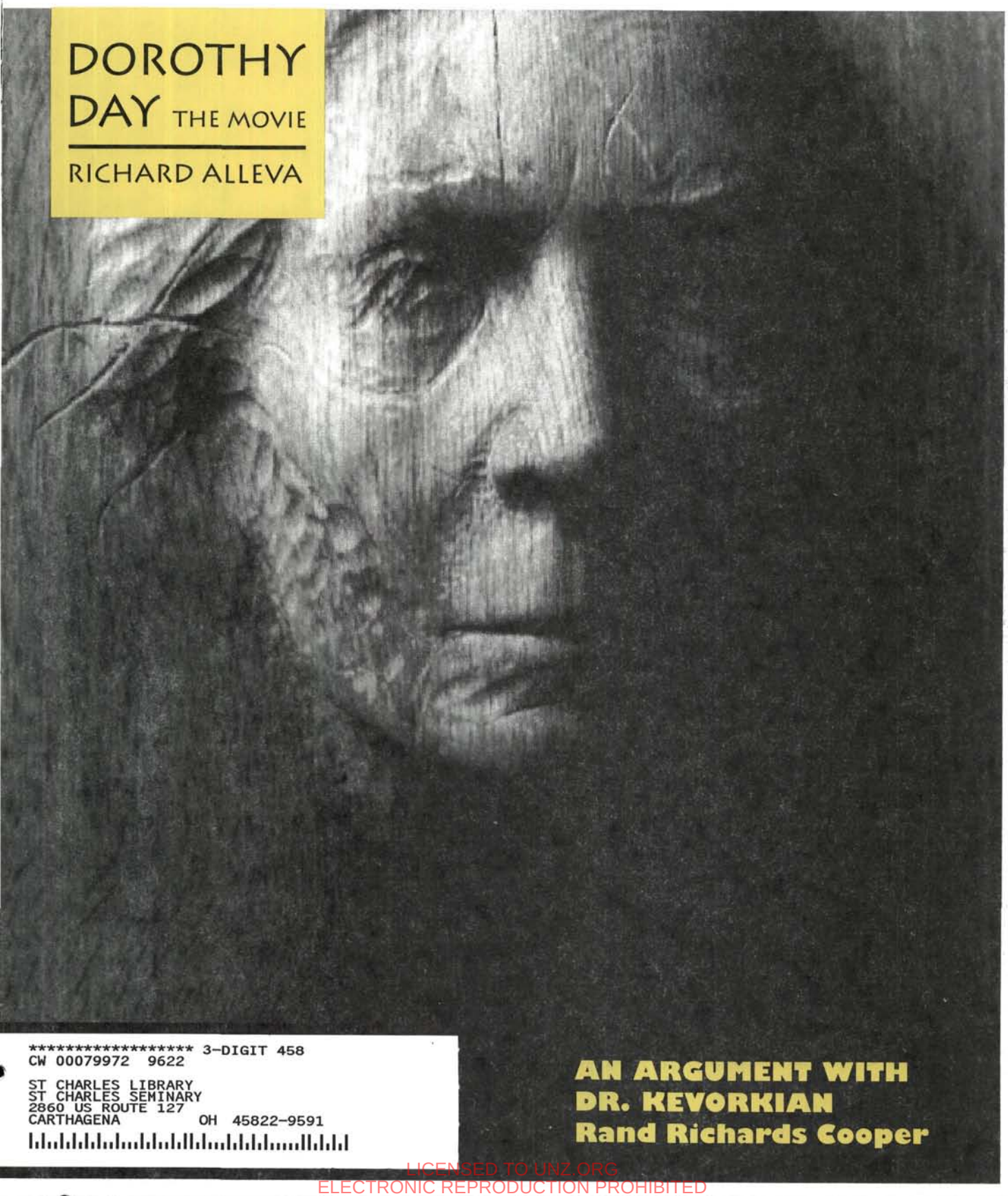

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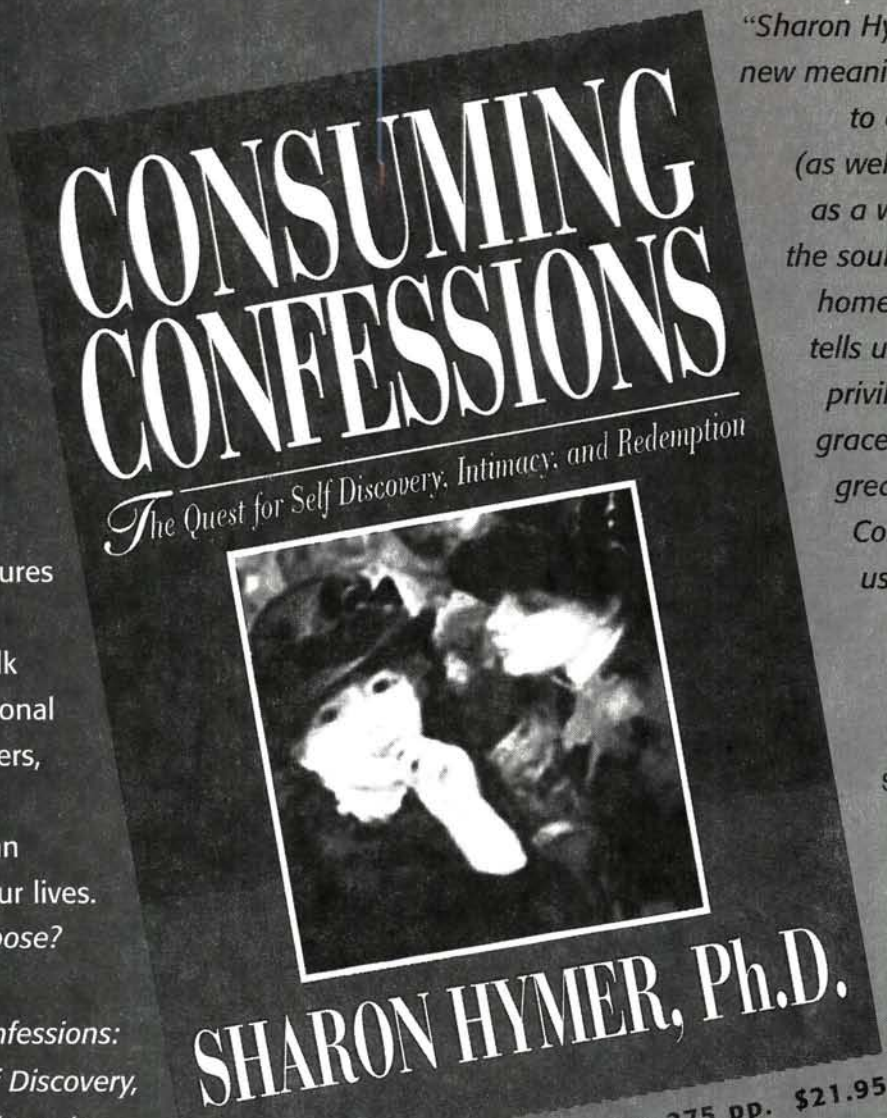

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COMMONWEAL

October 25, 1996 / Volume CXXIII, Number 18

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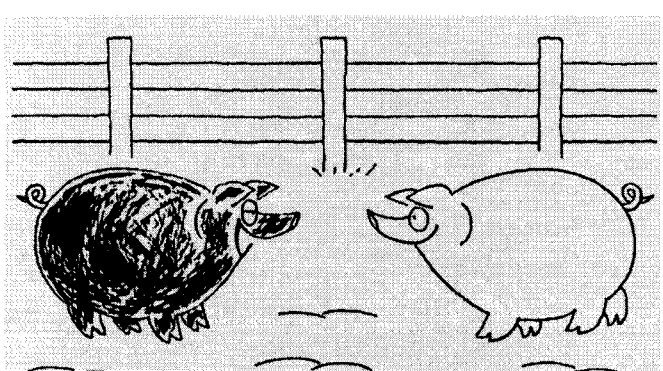

"You've got a girl friend, don't you?"

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To the Editors

Give Dems a chance

Sidney Callahan admits that she might be wrong in her decision to vote for Bob Dole this November, and that she's willing to hear from others on the matter [correspondence, September 27]. I'm willing to take up that challenge.

I agree that single-issue voting, particularly if the issue in question involves fundamental questions of justice (such as not deliberately depriving innocent human beings of their lives), is absolutely legitimate; it may even be a moral imperative. I did it three times, voting Republican in 1980, 1984, and 1988, ignoring certain of my religious beliefs, my working-class origins, countercultural sensibilities, and a visceral dislike of the GOP acquired during the Vietnam era.

Like so many others then and now, the abortion issue simply tipped the scales of my conscience. While I had misgivings about Ronald Reagan in 1980, I voted first and explored them later. Four years on, whatever hopes for substantive action I once entertained had evaporated, replaced by a grim sense of duty in the absence of alternatives. 1988 saw me again voting Republican (I know, I know—*mea culpa*, O.K.?), this time choking back bile.

By 1992 a long-gestating conviction that I was politically trapped, being used by forces that in general stood for everything I opposed, led me to throw my (ambivalent) vote back to the Democrats. And, even though I now feel just about the same as Ms. Callahan about the current president, I'll do it again this year.

I will do it for a number of reasons, and because of my prolife convictions, not in spite of them. I cannot support the Republican party of the 1990s, whose soul is so clearly evident in that unhappy gubernatorial triumvirate, Weld of Massachusetts, Whitman of New Jersey, and Wilson of California. The GOP tent isn't only big enough to include them, they own it. Dole repeatedly telegraphed during the primary (and reinforced through his convention) that he has no intention of upsetting their camp.

A vote for Dole is not a vote for a prolife candidate or a prolife party; it is a vote for a party that knows how to manipulate voters whose moral sensibilities have backed them into a corner. To vote Republican now is to put one's *imprimatur* on a morally hollow strategy that consists of calculated lip service to the prolife cause, nothing more. My conscience won't allow me to play that game any longer because, as I see it, such a vote actually hurts the prolife cause. For one thing, it tells the Republicans it's safe to keep the prolife presence marginal and ineffective.

Can I vote for the Democrats? That's a harder call, but suffice it to say, yes. Despite an ambivalence similar to Ms. Callahan's, I will vote for them, primarily to support the Bonior-Casey wing of the party. I will vote in the hope that their voices will get more respect in the future, precisely because the prolife vote hasn't entirely fled to the GOP.

I'm aware that this position is problematic, that I may have landed on the flip side of the earlier dilemmas. That's why I respect the decision of Ms. Callahan and others who agree with her. Nevertheless, I still believe that in the long run it harms the prolife cause to have it perceived nationally as part of the GOP's utterly cynical "family values" platform. The Democratic party needs more not fewer prolife voters for that perception to change.

The Democratic party is all we have to resist a further catastrophic lurch to the right in this nation. So I will vote for Bill Clinton as the flawed, frustrating, and far-from-satisfactory leader of that party. And I hope that someday, perhaps, we can have an authentic political debate over abortion because there will be a strong prolife vote in the party that should, by rights, be the home of that cause.

I look forward to hearing more from Ms. Callahan on this issue.

JOHN H. HAAS
Notre Dame, Ind.

The writer teaches in the department of history at the University of Notre Dame.

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The issue that matters

In response to the letters in the correspondence section for September 27: Yes, one does hate to be a one-issue voter, but really! If Hitler had good economic policies, would we be free to vote for him? ("It's too bad about his position on the Jewish death camps, but he has the best interests of the country at heart.") If the lives of the tiny and helpless don't matter, we've already lost our freedom. For they are our brothers, sisters, neighbors, children; how dare we let them be put to death? Pray that Americans will choose life.

MARTHA DOWNING
Yellowstone, Wyo.

(Continued on page 28)

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Things left unsaid

As the saying goes, be careful what you pray for. For years observers of American politics have deplored its lack of civility. In their first televised debate earlier this month, President Bill Clinton and his Republican challenger Bob Dole appeared to take that criticism to heart. Ideas and issues took center stage. As a result, the American public got ninety somnolent minutes of remarkably civil thrust and parry.

Despite the wholly predictable, and let's face it, somewhat tedious course of the debate, Americans can still be grateful that both men avoided cheap shots and lurid accusations. Dole, who carried the burden of what appears to be a foundering campaign, made a few cyanide-tipped comments. But none broke the skin. As a result, a clear picture emerged (at least for those who stayed awake) of the differences and, perhaps even more revealing, the striking similarities in the views of these two life-long politicians.

Dole tried to make the antigovernment case espoused so vociferously by Newt Gingrich and the Republican House majority, but his heart wasn't in it. He defended his 15-percent tax cut proposal as well, but again without much in the way of passion or conviction. As a wounded veteran and respected congressional legislator, Dole knows, and to his credit acknowledges, that government has a vital role to play in helping to secure opportunity and meet basic human needs. Noting that his own mother had relied on Social Security and Medicare, and that he himself had benefited from the GI Bill, Dole said, "I've had the best health care in government hospitals, Army hospitals, and I know its importance, but we've got to fix it." Later, concurring in the need for food stamp and W.I.C. programs, he added, "I'm no extremist....I care about people."

Though eager to boast of efficiencies brought to government under his administration, Clinton went a step further than his opponent, stressing not just the need for government but the good it can do. "I believe that the purpose of politics is to give people the tools to make the most of their own lives, to reinforce the values of opportunity and responsibility, and to build a sense of community."

Clinton cited the Family Leave and Brady bills along with environmental protection laws, student loans, and other education spending as examples of where government can make a difference for the better. He criticized Dole and the Republican party for proposed cuts in Medicare funding, and reminded listeners that Dole voted against the founding Medicare legislation in 1965. Conceding the need for restructuring entitlement spending—something his campaign ads are far from honest about—Clinton argued that "we need someone who believes in [Medicare] to reform it."

How either candidate might actually act on the issues once in office is uncertain. Still, some things are clear. In contrast with Republican true believers who preach the devolution if not the dismantling of the federal government, Dole gave no encouragement to such dangerous nonsense. Dole, in a word, is not Gingrich. Still, the differences between the two candidates are instructive. Dole advocates a further retrenchment of government's role. Clinton envisions, if tentatively, a more active federal hand in helping Americans cope with economic and social change.

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"Since politicians always seem to make everything worse, if elected, I promise to do nothing."

Both men agreed that campaign-finance reform and the growth of entitlement spending were so fraught with political boobytraps that neither party was likely to tackle them. Encouragingly, both conceded that an independent commission might be able to diffuse the political costs of reform in these areas. Yes, God and balanced budgets are all in the details, but at least both candidates hinted at what lies ahead: means-testing and cost-containment for Medicare and perhaps even Social Security.

Dole's criticism of Clinton's foreign policy was as scattershot and ad hoc as the administration's own actions abroad. Here is another problem whose intrinsic difficulty is at least tacitly recognized by all. Neither Republicans nor Democrats have yet formulated a cogent response to the post-cold war world. U.S. leadership in Bosnia has brought about a measure of peace, but it took too long for Clinton to act and the eventual resolution of the conflict remains opaque. Even Clinton's "success" in Haiti is clouded by questions about U.S. motives (was it principally to curtail illegal immigration?) and the moribund state of democracy in that violent and near-destitute island republic.

There were, of course, crucial issues that went largely unremarked. Nothing was said about immigration law or about abortion, and very little about welfare reform. It was scandalous, even eerie, that the perilous economic condition of the poor, and especially the millions of supposedly "able" men and women who may soon find themselves without either welfare benefits or jobs, was passed over in silence. Ending the sixty-year federal welfare guarantee is, as Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) has eloquently warned, a reckless leap into the unknown. If the states are able to administer successful workfare programs, that's all to the good. But if jobs for the unskilled do not materialize, those jobs will have to be created by government, either at the state or federal levels. Yes, dignity and self-reliance are the fruits of work. But where there is no private-sector work, the community has a moral obligation to meet the basic needs of the poor.

There appears to be little enthusiasm for either candidate within their own parties or in the population at large. For Republicans, Dole lacks Ronald Reagan's hard-core beliefs and charisma. Democrats, still reeling from their own ineptitude and the almost nihilistic assault on government by the Gingrich Congress, feel themselves continually betrayed by Clinton's willingness to cut, so to speak, deal after deal with the devil. "American politics, especially now, does not offer us a choice between a party that favors the rich and one that favors the poor," Garry Wills wrote recently in the *New York Review of Books* (October 3). "Clinton cannot be called to account by an electorally nonexistent Left. We must choose between a party that neglects the poor and one that savages them, between a party that defers to the rich and one that deifies them, between a party that abjectly apologizes for government and one the demonizes it."

That is a fair description of the public discourse of the past decade, and especially the past two years. But, curiously, that was not the face Bob Dole revealed in debate. Of course, Dole may have been play-acting. Then again, maybe Dole's refusal to rail against the public institutions to which he has devoted his life suggests that he recognizes the Washington-bashing tide has crested, and the people have rallied to the defense of what is, after all, their own government.

If that is the case, this election could be not only the end of an ugly period of confrontation, but the beginning of a more realistic and generous consensus about what Americans owe one another.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

DEATH'S FEARFUL CURSE

Losing this life's dear pleasures

"Are you afraid to die?" my newly bereaved son asked. "If you believe we're all going to heaven, aren't you eager to get there? So why forbid suicide to those people who don't want to live?"

Oh, oh, I thought. Here's another instance where the personal and the political meet. My general opposition to suicide must start at home.

"Good question," I reply. "When I'm out giving talks against assisted suicide and euthanasia I try to be honest about my own feelings about death. It's crucial to recognize how important emotions are when considering end-of-life decisions."

So, yes, I admit it, I am afraid of dying. Even though I do not doubt the good news that Christ has won for us the gift of eternal life, dying scares me. I am mortally afraid of facing death because I fear that at the last moment I might be overwhelmed by panic and anxiety. And then I might doubt and despair.

Thirty-five years ago I had a few panic attacks after losing my infant son to

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sudden infant death syndrome. I've never forgotten the intense dread and horror of the feeling that I was dissolving into nothingness and would explode and be extinguished.

If I should experience such a fear when facing death, I doubt that my faith could stand against the terror. Saints such as Thérèse may have experienced blackness and loss of faith at the approach of death, and who knows what Jesus felt as he sweat blood on the night he was betrayed. In the *Iliad*, Homer repeatedly sings of "courage-shattering death," and I can imagine how one's courage might fail before the great transition imposed by the grim reaper.

On a lighter note, I must admit that I have always hated transitions, especially those totally out of my control, such as the second stage of childbirth, airplane takeoffs, or becoming the anesthetized patient upon the operating table. My own private metaphor for living and dying is to envision our existence here as something like that of the fetus in the womb, and when we die we are born into the new creation. Unfortunately, I'm sure I was the kind of fetus who didn't want to risk the trip. As an adult but fairly infantile Christian, I could never say with Saint Paul that I long "to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23).

Part of my problem has to do with capitulating to inertia, that motherlode of sin, but also with the fact I am much too content and happy with my family, work, friends, and this life's dear pleasures: hot baths, the *New York Times*, good novels. Only occasionally do the sorrows and evils of the world intrude on my life strongly enough to produce a pang of loathing for this world, along with a strong desire to escape this life. Enough already. *Maranatha.*

Of course, if I have to face impairment and chronic illness in old age, death may not seem so horrible. As a coward I already dread the pain, suffering, and irritating tedium of dying. To my way of thinking there can be no natural death. Death is always an affront, that effect of the Fall that Saint Augustine says will always mar the happiness of human beings. We are made for eternal blessedness.

I am left cold by those enthusiasts for nature's cycles who welcome the autumn leaf's dying fall as part of the death that replenishes the earth. Remember, it was pagan devotees of nature's endlessly recurring cycles of life and death who sacrificed virgins to the gods of the mountain. Their descendants still remain half in love with easeful death and have faith in glowing accounts of near-death experiences.

No, death is better seen by Christians as a fearful curse from whose jaws Christ has saved us. Death may have lost its sting but it is still horrible.

So how does this argument over the proper emotions associated with dying impinge on our larger cultural and ethical debates about end-of-life decisions? In plenty of ways, I'd say.

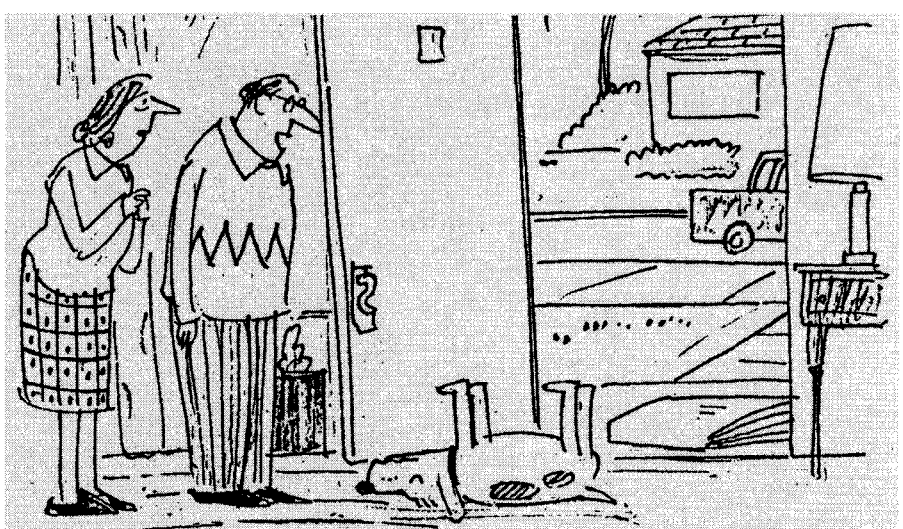
Will not fear of death and dying (acknowledged or unacknowledged) make many people clutch too long to the last gasp of physiological life—no matter what price it may entail in technological interventions, financial resources, or increased suffering?

On the other hand, some despairing people may so desperately wish to escape from suffering and the dying process that they will attempt suicide or get others to help them do so. To preempt passivity and overcome the anxiety of dependence, many defend themselves by actively taking control of events. Violent acts can be engendered from one's rebellion against dependency. I will not serve, cry Lucifer and Stephen Daedalus.

Then there are the emotional responses of those who will care for the dying. Many will long for escape because they dread to watch their loved ones die. Physicians, friends, and families will have strong positive and negative emotional reactions when they must support the dying.

Much more needs to be said on this topic, but here we can only affirm that we do well to call to mind the complexity of emotional responses when we hear simple-minded talk from policy makers about "voluntary" and "rational" decisions.

Back on the personal front, individuals can continue the tradition of praying for a good death. As an anxious soul, I long to be spared panic; I desire the grace of courage in order to bear whatever has to be borne. In fact, it's never too early to start practising how to die well. No, I don't recommend that you sleep in your coffin as Sarah Bernhardt did. But I do repeat as my mantra that "perfect love casts out fear." And to make the truth of God's love for us more real, I call up a vision of mother and child; God is the mother and I am the babe in arms. (Thank you, Dame Julian; thank you, Thérèse.) When assaulted by attacks of anxiety and fearful distress, I try to imagine myself supported, enfolded, held safe, soothed, and comforted by the ever loving arms. Yes, everything's going



"The Sunday **New York Times** *finally got too big for him."*

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to be all right; all will be well.

Happily, we Catholics have one other bridge over troubled water when confronting the awful prospect of our dying; we can bank on the belief that a holy and good mother, you-know-who, will pray for us, now and at the hour of our death. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

TAKING LIBERTIES

Lawyers above the law

The younger of my two sons has just begun law school. What a great country. For years I have been an underpaid columnist, yet within a short time my son can look forward to being an overpaid lawyer. And all this in two generations!

This past summer, before he left for school, he and I would sometimes discuss one of my pet peeves, the usurpation (as I see it) of legislative authority by the courts, especially the United States Supreme Court.

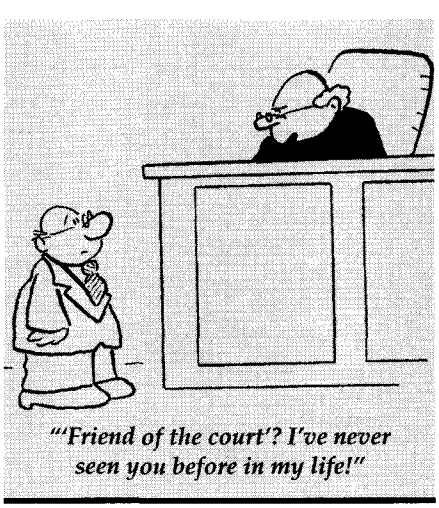
I would probably have been unhappy with the lawmaking imperialism of the courts in any case, but my unhappiness is aggravated by my experience as a state legislator. I spent twelve years in the Rhode Island Senate, and every time the courts strip American legislatures of one more area of jurisdiction I take it personally.

I am like those women you often run into in the prolife movement, activists with a large number of children. They find the prochoice ideology personally offensive, since it seems to them to devalue their many maternal sufferings and sacrifices. I am similarly offended by the ideology of judicial imperialism, which seems to devalue my years of legislative suffering and sacrifice.

My son tells me that his professors have scant sympathy for my pet peeve. They concede that courts should give deference to legislatures, but not absolute deference. Laws must be *reasonable*; and when they are not, courts (who, as we know, are incarnations of reason) have no choice but to intervene.

I respond by saying that this is exactly the kind of thing you'd expect law professors to say. After all, the more powerful courts become, the more powerful is the legal profession as a whole. Thus, all lawyers have a vested interest in seeing courts expand their jurisdiction.

And if this is true of lawyers generally, it is *a fortiori* true of law professors. The latter, especially those at elite law schools, are the normal source of ideas for judges. An imperialistic judiciary needs an endless supply of new ideas in order to justify its aggressions, yet few judges are sufficiently intellectual to create their own ideas, and among those possessing this capacity fewer still have the leisure needed. Hence judges become dependent on the world of law professors, a world that abounds in creative and leisured intellectuals. If democracy is being replaced by "judgocracy," this latter is increasingly becoming a fig leaf for "professorocracy."



"'Friend of the court'? I've never seen you before in my life!"

Perhaps Plato, who disliked democracy and wanted society to be governed by philosophical rulers, would have been tickled by this development. But it is doubtful it would have pleased Abraham Lincoln, who, though a lawyer—but one who had never been ministered to by law professors—was attached to the quaint notion that America should have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. In his day courts were less prone to overrule legislatures than they are now. But it happened at least once during his years as a lawyer, in the *Dred Scott* case; and Lincoln, not having had the good fortune to be tutored by twentieth-century law professors, did not applaud the decision as the triumph of "reason" over "the tyranny of the majority."

One of the great sachems of the law-professor tribe is Ronald Dworkin, who holds professorships on both sides of the Atlantic, at Oxford and at New York University. In the August 8, 1996, issue of the *New York Review of Books*, he gives striking expression to a constitutional theory that can only be described as profoundly antidemocratic, at least if we take "democracy" in its literal sense, that is, as synonymous with "popular government."

There Dworkin discusses two 1996 federal appeals court decisions that held, though on different grounds, that there is a constitutional right to assisted suicide. The Ninth Circuit held that the state of Washington's legislative ban on assisted suicide was an unwarranted violation of a person's liberty interest. The Second Circuit held that New York's ban was unconstitutional on equal-protection grounds, since New York permits the termination of life-saving efforts in extreme situations, and the court could see no substantial difference between *letting* someone die and *making* someone die. (How odd, and how typical, that the court should prove its superior wisdom by failing to grasp a distinction that everyone always grasped until a few academics raised a quibble the day before yesterday.)

"The Supreme Court," Dworkin says, "has not yet indicated whether it will hear appeals from these cases. It is by

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no means certain that the Court will ultimately confirm them. But if it does, judges will have brought about another social revolution." Did you hear what the professor said? "*Another social revolution*"—a revolution made by judges. What an amazing thing for a constitutional scholar to applaud!

Most of us benighted folks—neither lawyers nor professors of constitutional law—were not aware that one of the functions of the Supreme Court is to make social revolutions. We thought that revolutions, if they must take place, should be the creation of society itself, perhaps with the assistance of democratically elected officials. Before Professor Dworkin broke the news, no one had told us that the United States Supreme Court belongs to the same institutional genus as Plato's philosopher-kings and Lenin's vanguard party, undemocratic elites who know better than the people what is in the people's best interests. Some of us had even imagined that courts were essentially conservative institutions, "the least dangerous branch," as a legal scholar once called them.

As he makes clear in many writings, Dworkin approves of the abortion revolution the Court made in 1973; he is now calling on the Court to make a euthanasia revolution; and he would clearly welcome a judge-made homosexual revolution. In other words, his revolutionary agenda is the agenda of cultural liberalism, and his elaborate, legal-philosophical reasoning allows him to arrive at the same conclusions the typical cultural liberal arrives at through sheer predilection.

It is extremely unlikely that cultural liberalism could enact its agenda through normal democratic processes, that is, by winning elections and passing bills in Congress and state legislatures. So it long ago resorted to the undemocratic strategy of having the courts discover (oh, happy coincidence!) that the Constitution had enacted this very agenda a century or two earlier, even though, curiously, nobody had noticed this fact until the day before yesterday.

Thanks to imperialistic judges and their professorial apologists, this strategy has worked well to date. Abortion is thriving in America, and if things go as Dworkin and others in the legal professoriate hope, euthanasia and gay marriage will soon be thriving, too.

Of course, democracy will no longer be thriving. But, hey, you can't have everything. □

David Callahan

WHOSE STORY WILL WIN?

Why this election matters

For decades, die-hard liberal Democrats have invoked Harry Truman's maxim that when voters have a choice between a real Republican or a Democrat posing as a Republican, they will choose a real Republican every time. But this year, with President Bill Clinton careening to the center in his quest for re-election, Truman's folk wisdom could hardly be more wrong. Clinton is leading in the polls in large part because he has been so effective in co-opting key Republican issues like crime, fiscal responsibility, and family values. For legions of disillusioned Democrats, Clinton's bid to burnish his credentials as a fake Republican underscores the vanishing differences between the two major parties. The vote in November, many say, is about nothing at all.

Does the outcome of the election really make no difference? To believe so is to neglect a central reality—and irony—of the present moment: Even as two centrists vie for the White House, American politics writ large is becoming more ideologically competitive than at any time in recent memory. And, contrary to the cynics, what happens on election day will dramatically affect this competition.

The conservative resurgence that ended Democratic control of the Congress in 1994 is far from exhausted, even if many of its legislative ambitions have been thwarted. Thanks to a new emphasis on devolution and the push for a balanced budget, the assault on activist government has reached an unprecedented level of intensity. The conservative vision of a pared-down government that transfers power to the states and reduces federal regulations is more politically viable today than during the Reagan years. At the same time, the conservative focus on morality and personal responsibility has now penetrated to the very core of American political discourse. Whatever their legislative record of recent years, conservatives have made continuous forward progress in refining a grand story of American life that stresses the need to downsize government and return to traditional values.

Meanwhile, a renewal of progressive politics may already be under way. As inequality and economic insecurity grow in American life, so too does the manifest need for new measures to correct the imperfections of the marketplace. More immediately, as conservatives take aim at government programs and regulations that most Americans support, it has become easier for progressives to talk again about the virtues of government in a way that resonates with the public. And intellectually, progressives are better positioned now than at any other time in recent years to take advantage of the growing backlash against Social Darwinism in American life. After years of being hobbled by their own stale rhetoric and ideas, progressives have begun to fashion a new grand story of American life. The old liberal story from the 1960s stressed the need for an activist government that fought poverty and secured the rights of various long-oppressed minorities. It promised that growing prosperity and rising economic equality would go hand-in-hand. That story stopped selling to the public when wages stagnated, when welfare programs were seen as failing, and when the rights revolution snowballed into divisive identity politics.

In the new progressive grand story, activist government

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is being put forth as a basic necessity of twenty-first-century life. Government is needed to help traverse a turbulent period of economic transition and to protect Americans from the ravages of the global economy. Government is required to help stem inequality that seems to rise inexorably upward, no matter how much prosperity the market creates. In the new vision, the poor and minorities are still those who need activist government the most, but the best state interventions into the marketplace are those structured in universalist ways that do not engender resentment. Another distinguishing trait of the grand story now emerging on the left is the new emphasis on decentralized solutions to social and economic ills. By incorporating three decades of experimentation in the area of community development, the new progressive story is more in step with an American public that has historically been wary of centralized power.

It took conservatives over two decades to refine their grand story of American life and to develop a cadre of political leaders who were willing to tell it in unison. Neoprogressives are just at the beginning of their own long journey. The speed at which they travel will depend not only on how fast they flesh out the new story and nurture new leaders, but also on the success of revitalizing organized labor.

Progressive fortunes will be affected as well by the outcome of this presidential election.

A Dole victory would throw progressives on the defensive. Energy that might otherwise have gone into strategizing for the future would have to be spent on endless triage measures. Dole's presence in the White House would give a major boost to conservatives in Congress who have been repeatedly stymied by Clinton's veto. And while Dole probably doesn't believe in the supply-side vision he has embraced on the campaign trail, he would have little choice but to implement some portion of it and thus set back the clock. Indeed, as a man without his own ideological road map, Dole could find himself overshadowed and outmaneuvered on a number of issues by the passionate conservative ideologues who occupy top leadership positions in Congress.

To be sure, a Clinton victory would be no great triumph for progressives. However, for all of his sellouts of the Left during his first term, Clinton has helped to develop the new progressive grand story and could be expected to continue doing so in his second term. He has stressed the indispensable role of government in equipping Americans to survive in the new global economy, advocating efforts in job training and education. He has recognized the need for social programs to be universalist in nature and he understood how welfare, left unreformed, poisoned public support for activist social policy across the board. Rather than slowing the progressive resurgence, Clinton's signing of an odious welfare reform bill may aid it by denying conservatives a cudgel with which to assault the entire public sphere. Likewise, Clinton's effort to reinvent government has helped lay the groundwork for future public acceptance of new federal initiatives. Finally, Clinton has ended the conservative monopoly over the language of values and set the stage for progressives to blend this issue into their new grand story.

None of this is to say that Clinton is any kind of savior. He is best seen as a transitional president who has little choice but to govern from the center, holding the Right at bay while progressives get their own house in order. If Truman were around today, that highly pragmatic politician would be the first to recognize the many benefits of having a fake Republican in the White House rather than a real Republican. □

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John Buell

GETTING IT BACKWARDS

Why balancing the budget isn't enough

In the midst of a fiercely contested presidential election, too little attention has been devoted to a pivotal conviction shared by both major-party candidates. Both assume that if the federal government can only balance its books, our economic salvation will be assured. The candidates differ only in their appraisals of their opponent's willingness to take the hard steps needed to attain this widely valued goal.

The near universal belief that we are going broke helps explain much of the public confusion over such valued domestic programs as Medicare. Most citizens know that some federal programs have been sound and effective. Even this Democratic president, however, has become a born-again budget balancer, thereby undercutting much of the public will to preserve even those social initiatives citizens have long respected. Nonetheless, before everyone becomes inured to the homely verities about the cruelties debt imposes on our grandchildren, I would like to offer four bits of folk wisdom:

- *Look before you leap.* Some perspective on the size and origin of the problem might be useful. The significance of

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any debt lies in its relationship to capacity to pay. The current national debt is still a far smaller fraction of our total economy than it was in the late forties. We emerged from this earlier "binge of debt" as the world's strongest economic power. University of California-Riverside economist Robert Pollin has shown that economic growth in the big-spending 1945–80 era was far faster than during the years of limited government and small debts, 1875-1929.

During the post-World War II period, government taxes and job creation modulated the typical capitalist business cycles. However, in the Arcadian past celebrated by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, business profits were not automatically reinvested in new facilities, and worker income and consumer power did not always keep pace with growing productivity. Even before the tragic climax of that era, the Great Depression, bouts of unemployment were frequent and crushing.

● *Actions speak louder than words.* Business leaders preach the virtues of fiscal austerity, but most businesses borrow money in order to expand. (So also do most political magazines, both left and right.) Indeed, as the size and productivity of the business grow, so does its debt.

Businesses also distinguish between operating and capital budgets. It is unreasonable to expect a business immediately to pay off the cost of a new lathe intended to last at least a decade. Jeff Faux of the Economic Policy Institute reports that if the U. S. Treasury distinguished between operating and capital expenditures, our current deficit would shrink by about $140 billion.

● *Think long-term.* Most families have debt. The smart ones borrow to send kids to college or to buy a home. Foolish families borrow for Florida vacations. Recently, both business and government have been taking lessons from the foolish families. Nearly 80 percent of the funds borrowed by U.S. corporations in the 1980s went for leveraged buyouts, mergers, and acquisitions. These costly moves improved short-term profitability and market power but did relatively little to create jobs or increase productivity. Government itself spends more on the military in real terms than in 1980 and far less on basic energy research. Following the worst business practices, government seeks short-term leverage rather than the more enduring sources of security in a technologically evolving world. In many of our competitor nations, unions and the public are much more diligent in insisting that private profits, and public revenues go to productive social uses.

● *If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?* Conservatives are right about one thing: Government spending doesn't buy as much prosperity or social peace as it once did. Government debt as a percent of our total national wealth has grown dramatically in recent years—but without typical gains in employment and productivity. The real problem, however, is corporate trade and labor policies. With fair and equal rules, trade benefits everyone. Today, however, Clinton and Gingrich have agreed to grant Mexican-based firms entry to our market even though the Mexican government refuses to create jobs for its own unemployed, enact realistic minimum-wage laws, or protect its workers against corporate abuse.

When our government makes social investments during slack times, it still directly creates some good jobs in this country. The spillover effect that occurs when newly hired workers spend their income and create other high-paying jobs is, however, no longer as strong as it was in the fifties and sixties. Our workers today buy many goods made by poorly paid Mexicans working in modern branch plants that U.S. corporations established to evade domestic labor standards. Competition with these exploited workers gradually undermines our unions and depresses our wages. Short-term corporate profits grow, but the distribution of income becomes more unequal. Work by economists Richard Freeman and Lawrence Katz attribute as much as 40 percent of the recent growth in inequality to trade-related problems. They attribute another 20 percent to union weakness, itself fostered in part by competition with exploited, nonunion foreign labor.

These trends augur poorly for all of us, for, just as during the nineteenth century, sluggish wages and weak unions mean slow growth in consumer spending. When purchases start to lag behind productive capacity, even the low interest rates that balanced budgets are supposed to bring won't induce businesses to invest in new technologies. With wages being depressed everywhere by the mobility of business and attacks on unions, even sensibly targeted federal investments no longer create the spirals of productivity and job growth they once fostered. Our debt grows in proportion to our GNP and our dollar starts to lose value.

Misguided private and public investments and inequitable trade and labor policies could eventually make the worst scenarios of Clinton, Dole, Gingrich, Armey, and Gramm come true. Government could be hamstrung with growing debts and interest payments—increasingly to foreign banks. Our dollar could sag further in value, eroding our economic security. But we would have Clinton and Gingrich to blame. The recent growth of debt in proportion to the size of our economy is a symptom of deeper problems inherited from trade policies and investment priorities. Meat-ax approaches to social spending and the deficit will only make things worse by starving our economy of needed long-term investments.

Speaker Gingrich, Dick Armey, and other leading congressional Republicans are fond of a quip to the effect that: "A poor person never gave anyone a job." They have it all backwards. Few businesses ever grew rich without a market of well-paid and well-treated worker/consumers. Only prudent and timely social investment, along with support for worker rights both at home and abroad, can assure those markets. □

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THE DIGNITY OF HELPLESSNESS

What sort of society would euthanasia create?

Rand Richards Cooper

I'm looking for an argument with Jack Kevorkian; or rather, for one against him. Life for Kevorkian lately has come laden with satisfying vindications. Weary prosecutors, having failed to convince three Michigan juries that Kevorkian's eagerness in assisting suicide is a crime, now seem ready to toss in their cards and go home. Once dubbed "Dr. Death" by medical school classmates for his unseemly obsession with terminal illness, the ex-pathologist stands redeemed and embraced as a pioneering American hero. "Jack's doing something that is right," says his lawyer, Geoffrey Fieger. "Everyone instinctively understands that—that's why we're winning."

Whatever you may feel about Kevorkian personally—and I admit to finding him an unlikely standard-bearer, with his smug and aggressive looniness, for a human dignity movement—you have to admire how deftly he has taken the pulse of the nation's moral reasoning. Kevorkian has put our agonized ambivalence about life-prolonging medical technologies into the rights-based framework of our political discourse, producing a case for assisted suicide that seems unassailable. Its logic goes like this: If I am afflicted, say, with inoperable cancer, and if after discussions with loved ones I decide I would rather die now, in dignity, than a year from now, why shouldn't I have this right? How does my exercising it conceivably impair the rights of any other person?

It doesn't, say the juries who keep acquitting Kevorkian; that's why the government should butt out. Whose death is it, anyway?

As a means of sparing loved ones suffering, assisted suicide expresses our most compassionate urges and motives. Nevertheless, I believe the notion of a "right" to die provides far too narrow a framework for discussing the widespread institutionalization of the practice. Talk about rights resonates deeply with Americans. It is our strongest political instinct; our melody and our beat. Other societies stress sacrifice or obedience, glory or passion or style or work, but we always come back to rights. And therein lies the rub. The appeal of rights is so compelling that it leaves scant room for realities and interests not easily expressed as rights. And with assisted suicide that means leaving out way too much.

Consider the predicament of the elderly. Kevorkian pledges himself to "the absolute autonomy of the individual," and insists that practitioners of "obitiatry" (as he proposes calling the new medical specialty) would administer only to those who truly *want* to die. But what exactly is the "absolute autonomy" of an elderly, ailing person convinced he or she is a burden to everyone? I remember how my grandmother, who died a few years ago at ninety-seven, used to lament being a "burden" on the rest of us. "I don't know why I'm still alive," she'd say, sighing. She didn't really mean it; but there's no doubt in my mind that the obitiatric option, had it existed, would have added an extra tinge of guilt to her last couple of years—particularly after she entered a nursing home whose costs began to eat up the savings she and my grandfather had accumulated over decades of thrift. Do we want to do that to our elderly and infirm? How will we prevent the creep toward an increased sense of burdensomeness that the very availability of assisted suicide is likely to cause?

Next, what about creeping changes in the rest of us? In a society in which assisted suicide is a ready option, how will we view those who don't choose it? I'm imagining Ben Jonson's grim sixteenth-century farce, *Volpone*, updated for our time, a circle of heirs crowding round the bedside, impatient for the obitioner. But I'm also thinking about something far subtler, that gradual habituation of mind Tocqueville called the "slow action of society upon itself." Much as we

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like to imagine otherwise, the truth is that our inventions and our beliefs are implacably dynamic. The things we make turn around and remake us; and just as the Pill helped transform our ideas about sexual freedom, so will the obitioner change the way we regard aging. How often in the assisted-suicide future will someone look at an elderly person and think, consciously or semiconsciously, "Gee, guess it's about time, huh?"

And do we want that?

Such questions find scant place in a discussion that focuses solely on the "autonomous" individual and his "right" to die. That's why I want to take Kevorkianism out of the discussion of individual rights and put it into a discussion of something I'll call, for want of a better phrase, the texture of civic life. By this I mean simply the thoughts we have in our heads about ourselves and one another; the shape and feel of our daily, moment-to-moment relations. Will institutionalizing assisted suicide equip us to be better human beings for each other, or will it unequip us?

When I was twenty I lived for a time in Kenya. One hot afternoon found me at a grade school in Nairobi, helping out at a fair for handicapped children. The event was understaffed, and when after games and lunch the children started having to go to the bathroom, things got hectic. A clamorous line of kids in leg braces and primitive wheelchairs formed outside the single outhouse. They needed help getting in, help going and cleaning up afterward. I did what I could, but I was young and singularly unschooled in this kind of neediness. Vividly I recall a boy of ten who walked with two crutches, dragging useless legs behind him. During the long wait he had defecated in his pants, and as I helped him to the outhouse door I retched, despite myself, at the stench and the stifling heat. Seeing my distress, another organizer, a thirtyish guy named Dennis, picked up the boy and swiftly carried him into the outhouse. I followed, watching as Dennis squatted before the boy, cleaning him with a towel, the boy looking up with a calm and patient expression.

That memory comes back to me whenever an acquaintance of mine—a man in his mid-sixties and in good health—outlines his game plan for old age. For him, goal number one is never, ever to become a helpless burden. "Once I start shitting my pants," he says, "that's it. Take me out and shoot me." I share his dread of becoming vulnerable, dependent, smelly; who doesn't? Yet at the same time I find myself looking back to that moment in the outhouse in Kenya, years ago. Helplessness was there, of course, and burden too, but beauty as well, so much so that I have never forgotten it—the helper and the helped joined in a mutual courage I could only hope some day to possess.

My point is that we experience a profound aspect of our humanity precisely in our intimate and awful knowledge of each other's physical neediness; and further, that what we draw from this knowledge constitutes not only a spiritual good but a social good. If, following the quality-of-life, take-me-out-and-shoot-me principle, we end up using assisted suicide to preempt the infirmities of old age and terminal illness, how well equipped will we be to encounter infirmity elsewhere? How to become fluent in help if we have banished helplessness from our vocabulary? I'm thinking of the way we treat people in wheelchairs, people who can't feed themselves, whose bodies don't look or work "right." Taken together with prenatal genetic testing and selective abortion, might not assisted suicide further a gradual drift toward functionalism in our attitude to life? Societies that drift in this direction, as Germany did under the Nazis, instill in their citizens a visceral sense of the handicapped as a drain or drag on the healthy body of the rest of us: a pointless deformity; an un-luck; an un-person. Such attitudes are not spontaneous manifestations of evil. You have to train people to feel this way; but if you do, they will.

A few years ago, my mother's lifelong best friend died at sixty of lung cancer. The last phase of Gretchen's life involved multiple surgeries, long hospital stays that sapped the will, and the disorienting pressures of pain and medication. For my mother, there was the anguish of watching a person she loved being overwhelmed by illness—an especially hard kind of sorrow. ("She's not there anymore," my mother would say after a bad visit.) But then came moments of joy—a visit or a phone call or a handwritten note in which, suddenly, Gretchen was there again, emerging by some grace from the fog of her illness to share with my mother an affirmation of how much they had loved and enjoyed each other through the decades of their friendship.

My mother has a bulletin board in her kitchen where she tacks up cards, favorite maxims, snapshots, and the like. But she doesn't display the last few notes she got from Gretchen. Instead, she keeps them taped to the inside of a cabinet high over the stove. I suspect they are still too highly charged for her; too much suffering and beauty attach to them.

Gretchen's illness is the kind on which Kevorkianism makes its core appeal—a remorseless, irreversible disease that steals a person from us bit by bit. Assisted suicide offers a way, in effect, to manage death so that it arrives before this insidious larceny has begun. As such it is an attempt to do people dignity—and our memories of them, too—by enabling them to go out whole. It's an option I imagine Gretchen might well have availed herself of; my mother, for her part, came away from her friend's death with a firm belief in the rightness of assisted suicide.

And yet I think about those notes in her cabinet. It's hard to say this, but I believe that part of what makes them so profoundly meaningful to my mother is that they came from such a dark and pressured place, where Gretchen was not always the "same" Gretchen she had known. Finding her way back from that place to write those notes fashioned an understanding of courage which my mother carries with her today: the last of Gretchen's many gifts to her.

One needs to tread very softly here. Taken to extremes, the notion of a vested interest in each other's suffering becomes barbaric; and I don't want anyone to think I'm ques-

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Jim Kacian

Mortality

Here sounds the first alarm:
The end is now begun.
Henceforth I'm forced to face at last
My own oblivion.
The seed contains the germ:
Not all the flesh will firm.

There's no effective charm,
No knowing beyond one.
The rain lambada-ing the road
Is guttered when it's done.
Each drop bears out the berm:
Not all the flesh will firm.

We settle then, for warm.
What odd phenomenon
Can animate an *animus*
Beyond mere skeleton?
Fate will feed the worm:
Not all the flesh will firm.

tioning the correctness of relieving misery and pain. In fact, it's not assisted suicide per se I'm questioning, which in other forms has long been practiced unofficially by physicians informing the gravely ill about lethal doses, turning off ventilators to "let nature take its course," and so on. It's the institutionalizing of the practice I'm wondering about, and its effect on our relation to the *idea* of suffering. If we make assisted suicide widely available, will we end up virtually eliminating that phase of life in which people are not whole, "not there"? If so, will we be a better, richer, more humane society for having done so?

I'm aware many will consider this a pernicious basis for discussing the legality of assisted suicide. The notion that our laws should promote virtues as well as protect rights is anathema to modern American political thought. But the idea of rights alone can't capture the complexity of our connectedness to one another, and anyone who insists exclusively on them can end up sounding weirdly hollow. It is the hollowness, in fact, of Jack Kevorkian himself. I watched him not long ago on "60 Minutes." Asked by Mike Wallace to discuss the ethics of abortion—he is vehemently prochoice—Kevorkian mulled it over for a moment, then responded in this way: "The autonomy of the fetus can never supersede the autonomy of the mother." Whatever you may think of Kevorkian, or of abortion, I think you'll agree that these are exceptionally arid terms with which to encounter complex human dilemmas. But in purest form they are the terms of rights.

Current debates about welfare reform, about drug policy, violence on TV, the legality of youth curfews and school uniforms: all suggest a growing urge in America, across the political spectrum, to move beyond *laissez-faire* liberalism—what political theorist Michael J. Sandel has called our modern "aspiration to neutrality"—toward some vision of the good. Whether you call this impulse communitarianism, republicanism, statecraft as soulcraft, or a concern for civic texture, what it means is making connections not only between laws and rights, but between laws and character— the kind and quality of citizen laws inevitably help produce. Where does assisted suicide fit in? Is it possible that accompanying and consoling those we love through grievous terminal illness constitutes one of the core experiences we need to have? That part of us, some quality of pity and compassion and terror and love, is reachable only by taking that awful journey? And if so, does the law have a role to play? Should laws, can laws, have a stake in our complexity—in the quality of our togetherness as well as the fact of our separateness?

For the last few months of her very long life, my grandmother lay in a nursing home, floating in and out of consciousness, largely unable to eat. She wasn't in pain, but clearly she no longer possessed the active, vigorous perception which I believe institutionalizing assisted suicide may ultimately lead us to establish as the bottom-line criterion for meaningful life among the aged and the ill. For my part, I'd been fearing my visits to her, worrying that these last images of her diminished and helpless would later greedily elbow out other, happier memories. But this fear proved groundless. As it turns out, even those deeply unsettling moments when she looked more dead than alive and I barely recognized her, or when she unexpectedly squeezed my hand, as if sending a last, bodily message from some strange place between being and not-being—all of that forms part of the story of my grandmother that I carry with me; and I feel I am the richer for all of it, endowed with a more expansive vocabulary of body and spirit; and also a more intimate acquaintance with death, in all its mystery and terribleness.

Anyone who has accompanied someone through a terminal illness knows the solitariness of mortality—"the unknown," wrote English poet Edward Thomas shortly before his own death in World War I, "I must enter, and leave, alone." A sense of this deep privacy drives the right-to-die movement in America today. And yet to step outside the rights framework is to ask how institutionalizing assisted suicide will affect not only those who die, but those who live on; not only individuals, but society. The fact is, our deaths are both solo journeys toward an ultimate mystery and strands in the tapestries of each other's lives. Which side of this reality will we emphasize? Whose death is it, anyway? The debate about assisted suicide should begin at the place where that question ceases to be a rhetorical one. □

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'DON'T LOOK BACK'

A mother's farewell

David Loxterkamp

O bells ring for the ringing! The beginning and the end of the ringing! Ring, ring, ring, ring!
William Carlos Williams, "The Catholic Bells"

The crack of a church bell splits the crisp autumn air. Then silence floods over the land, for five seconds...six...now seven. It is a comforting calm, this silence worn easily and often by the dwellers of the Plains. But on the eighth beat, the sexton draws hard on the thick rope rising to Saint Margaret's steeple, and pierces me again with his requiem bells.

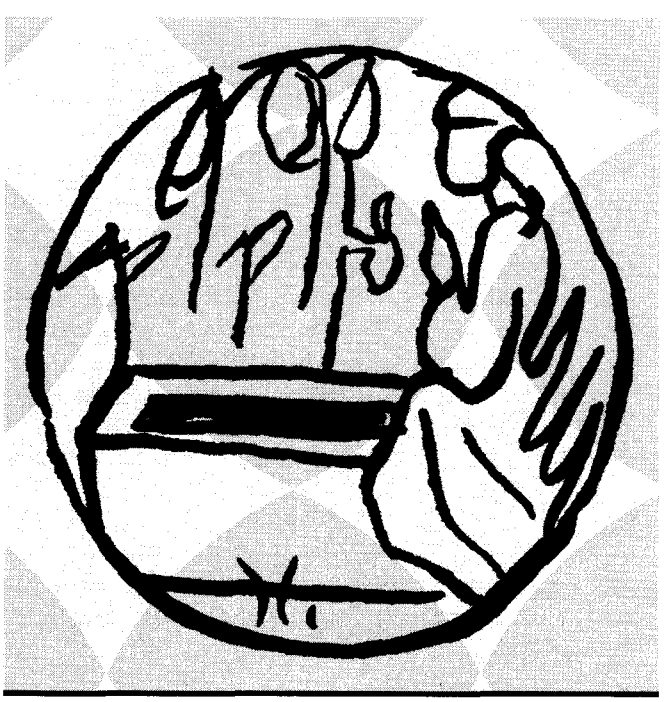
I tell you these are the same bells that rang in Mrs. Tostenrude's fifth-grade class. The sound soared to the third-story window of Rolfe Elementary and High School, two hundred yards across the playground and catercorner from Saint Margaret's. Once a month or so these bells would summon me to my sacramental chores. The altar boys would gather in the sacristy to don our cassocks and white starched surplices. Then we would hastily arrange the cruets of water and wine, ready the censer with a charcoal puck, and light the towering candlesticks that flanked the bier. Finally, Father Weingart would lead us down the center aisle to the darkened church vestibule, where we would greet the funeral procession with the solemn, soothing phrases of my Latin childhood, "*Subvenite, Sancti Dei, occurrite, angeli Domini, Suscipientes animam eius, Offerentes eam in conspectu Altissimi. Requiem aeternam dona ea, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ea.*" Come to her aid, O saints of God, come forth to meet her, angels of the Lord. Receiving her soul, presenting it to the Most High. Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her.

Long after the bells stopped ringing, the altar boys would join family and friends in the church basement for a Rosary Society dinner. We took our places proudly at the head table along with Father and the immediate family. Of all this, I remember most the dinner rolls, steaming bowls of corn and mashed potatoes, casseroles and slabs of ham that spilled from my plate, and the whipped cream salad whose concealed nuggets of cottage cheese would nearly gag me. We gave silent thanks during the blessing for a half-day free from school.

But today these bells reach me in the first car behind the hearse. We are following my mother, dead at age seventy-five. Her life was told in today's homily, which seemed only a slightly expanded, more salvific rendering of what the funeral home had printed on last night's prayer cards. Mom's card (with a feathered image of Saint Francis on the front) will join a rubber-banded deck tucked away in my top desk drawer. They are, for our German-Catholic relatives, a trading card that marks the passing of the generations.

After the funeral Mass, the motorcade crawls its well-worn route to a small parochial cemetery at the edge of town. There, the family gravestone has waited thirty years to receive my mom's dates, opposite my dad's.

In the quarter-century since I left home, the old neighborhood has picked up and moved here, slowly over time, from spacious Elm Street where disease has claimed more than the summer canopy. Here lie Russ and Maureen Ranney, our next-door neighbors, he who drilled my teeth and she who filled the cups of the coffee klatsch and were the best of family friends; the Tiernans down the block, who kept rabbits and teased me mercilessly about my big blue eyes; the Zeemans, whose daughter Cathy was struck by a passing motorist as her bicycle veered onto Elm near the tracks where we had played; the Biedermans, who pumped home heating oil; and the Reigelsburgers, who farmed and helped organize the annual spread at Saint Margaret's Turkey



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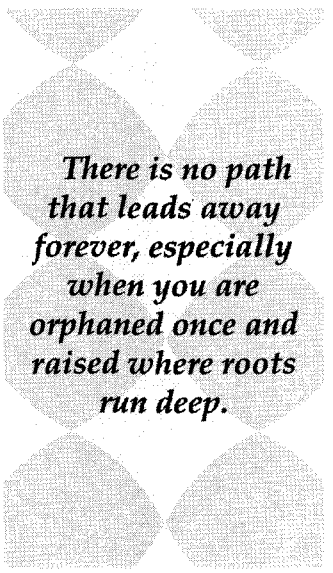
Supper. I can almost hear the silverware clinking, the bellow of a "howdy neighbor," the whine of my mower as it pushes through their tall grass or, in winter, a snow shovel that scrapes clean their blanketed walks.

As we stand in the shelter of the graveside tent, the wind whips through the brittle stalks of corn that surround us, and tugs at the canvas ties. It is the relentless wind of the Midwestern prairie, a presence and force to be contended with, a force that for generations has thinned our topsoil, thinned our young people, thinned us of the courage to be different. And spreads silence over the land.

The same wind that swept over us, my sister and brother and me, one week previous when we visited the pioneer cemetery at Old Rolfe. You could identify seven towns from its gentle slope, owing to the tabular lay of the land and the enormous concrete grain elevators that rise from every disappearing dot on the Iowa map. It was the same horizontal wind that suspended the flag outside our motel room at four in the morning when I would go alone to sit quietly with my dying mother. Eighty pounds was all that was left of her, lying peacefully in the bed, suspended on a sea of sighs and moans. We were waiting. All of us in silence waiting.



In our waiting, the children assembled a photo album that spanned mom's life, from her nursing graduation to her wedding, to all the vacations, birthdays, holidays, and reunions that followed, and the visits by her children that slowed to a trickle in recent years. The album told her visitors and nurses that this is our mother; she is not merely what you see. She was somebody in her life, someone vigorous and strong and big on the rules (except when they applied to her). She is now ruined and decayed, waiting to be raised to her final reward.

Just a few days earlier, Rosemary was still her feisty self. Over her practically dead body she was brought by ambulance to the Pocahontas Community Hospital. And from the moment of her admission she muttered, "Port, port, oh port." I finally realized that the word was "report," a duty she had discharged for over fifteen years as nursing supervisor after my dad had died. But she knew the jig was up when she could no longer finagle a cigarette from the nurses—her nurses—even with the threat of a hunger strike.

On the other hand, she was ready to die, ready to let the double pneumonia and anemia and probably a concealed cancer carry her away. I'll never forget the stunned, disappointed look on her face when I nudged her shoulder one day, and she startled awake. Squinting through her puffy lids, she moaned, "Oh my God, David, it's just you. I thought I had died and gone to heaven." She had been ready for the priest and his holy oils. "Rosemary," he had bent low to whisper in her ear, "are you ready to meet your Maker; to be with Ed again, and to join all the angels and saints at the great feast?" From somewhere deep inside that husk of a woman came the raspy conviction, "Amen, alleluia."

Mom was never one to drag out endings or mince goodbys. She liked our visits, but loved them short and sweet. And we grew to appreciate how exhausting they were on her. So when she offered to dine out, we jumped at the chance. The standing joke became, "I would have fixed a rump roast if you had stayed another night." On the morning of a departure, she would shoo us down to Dick's 66 for a fill-up, and, upon our return, meet us at the door of her apartment. Standing like a sentry in her aquamarine terry cloth bathrobe, she would hug us with one arm while dangling a cigarette in the other. Her eyes would water, but never release the tears she had long since learned to blink back. Then she would slip behind the kitchen door. But as we crunched away on the parking lot's loose gravel, I could see her sad face peering from the shadows behind half-drawn curtains.

The silences in my life have nearly slipped away. The morning ride to work, the evening meal with my family, the shopping trips and hectic appointment schedules are all filled with news and conversation, noise and chaos. Even during Mass, the "moment of silent prayer" after Communion is lost in our rush to a more meaningful liturgy. I still cling to an hour or two each morning, rising before the family stirs, to sit silently in the green glow of my desk lamp. And in this silence I remember my mother most, and the Plains, and the church.

The death of my mother has changed Iowa's grip on me. I was born here, my parents say, or at least kept by the good sisters of Saint Joseph Orphanage in Sioux City until I was two months old. Then Rosemary and Ed got the adoption papers and brought me home, raised me on the flat rich farmland of western Iowa, where you learn to appreciate straight roads and good schools. When I was thirteen my dad died, and ever since I dreamed of leaving home. But there is no path that leads away forever. Especially when you are orphaned once, and raised where roots run deep. It is harvest time now; the combines and six-row harvesters are fueled and idling; the grain cars wait on miles of track that service the colossal concrete silos. Here people are wedded to the land, not only by the burden of debt but by their sense of duty to work it, by the indisputable lay of its existence beyond their mailbox, their fence rows, their stand of timber. It cannot be picked up and moved like so much merchandise. Farming is something else again. While I was back, I heard someone say on the radio that "farming is one of those occupations where labor is not counted as a business expense." Those values stick, and I find myself today in a similar profession, my father's career, where the doctor and farmer both come to realize that success depends upon loving what you look after.

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Over the last several days my senses have been filled with Catholic bells, and the ginger-sweet smell of incense, and the waxing wind, and the tingling anticipation of harvest, and the haunting lyrics to Sunday's hymn, *"Alleluia! Not as orphans are we left in sorrow now. Alleluia! He is near us, faith believes, nor questions how."* The bells have shattered the old rule of silence: a silence imposed against unpleasantries we might otherwise mention at the supper table; a silence that filled our vacant house after daddy died and Mom returned to work; the silence of disappearing voices on a land that is losing its own. They have released me from exile; they have borne me to this graveside farewell. Yet the silence lingers and is all that remains, finally, when the bells cease their tolling.

The wings of our plane make a low bow to Eppley Airfield as we veer east toward the patchwork quilt that is Iowa-from-the-air. I grope under my seat for the small cache of mom's belongings. I find her purse. It is hefty; shot-filled with the weight of 73 dimes, 37 nickels, 7 quarters, and 215 pennies. It has, like everything in mother's keep, that musty smell of stale cigarettes. This is money back from the purchase of untold cartons of Winston Lights and bottles of Extra-Strength Tylenol and rolls of toilet paper that mom's friends purchased for her on weekly outings from the nursing home. She had stashed this trove in her apartment closet: a classic case of "out of sight, out of mind." But the truth is that mom was increasingly out of mind during her later years. And diminished by that fact, and by her broken record of bodily complaints, and by a taste for cigarettes that satisfied her more than her meals.

In the purse also is the letter. Written in 1983, it was the last time mom attended to matters of the estate. It is addressed "to all my children," with instructions to be read only on the advent of her death. We tore the seal last night at supper, with mom freshly in the grave, and dwelt upon her deciding line: "Remember that I loved you, and don't look back."

This is her strange legacy. I take it not as some veiled proscription against searching for my biological parents (though it may be that, too). It is more. It is about honoring the silences; accepting them as part of the cadence of life. It is about the pain she bore silently: the divorce of her Catholic parents; the early death of her invalid mother; her exodus from Saint Louis; her sister's alcoholism and early internment in a nursing home; the untimely death of her spouse and our family's struggle to be "normal" in the aftermath. It is about *this* silence, imposed by her death, and the sorrow it sows in our separate lives. And so, she says, "Look around. Look for the mothers who remain: Mother Church, Mother Earth, and the mother whose stiff blue hair your daughter stroked as I slept in my pillowed repose. Do not leave as an orphan. Remember that I loved you, and don't look back."

I have no doubt that when again I see those puffy eyes, they will sparkle. And not from tears choked back, but from the steam rising off the rump roast. □

Robert J. Oberg
Our Lady of Providence

—for Sister Betty

At eighteen my body opened out
on this long downhill,
something at the bottom of me
saying *yes* for the first time
as I climbed the curved embankment
and sprinted past my rival to victory
along the cupped hands of the bay.

Twenty years later I stagger this hill in pain
while the bright orbit of the ferris wheel
mocks my progress from Rocky Point,
its light eaten and offered by the bay.
Thick damp clay oozes from beneath my rib cage,
an invisible wound that's finally surfaced.
I stand in amazement, the silence broken

by distant screams of roller coaster riders,
punctuated finally by a gunshot
that puts out my left eye.
A trickle of blood washes the cavity.
My blindness hovers like a black patch
before a field of headlights that cross the
Newport Bridge,
its taut arch suspended above the glistening dark.

I fall at the spot where I'd put Palucci behind
and cry for help
as I've never cried before.
Send out all the 911's of my mind.
Ribs hurt so bad the screams almost kill me.
I rub the warm, smooth clay over my stomach
as the automatic stars flicker slowly out.

The shadow of a man startles me awake.
It appears he's been here for some time.
I don't know why it doesn't hurt
when he dips his fingers in my wound
and stirs my clay with his spittle.
He spreads the paste over my eye's throb
and by the time I can see again he's gone.

Leaves rustle behind me
as two Sisters of Mercy appear
and search for the print of his fingers
in my wound. They cross me, load me on a
stretcher
and carry me up the long hill to the convent.
I let go again of the dead weight of myself
and say *yes*....

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Richard Alleva

DIMINISHING DOROTHY DAY

'Entertaining Angels'

Whether she was in jail, simply walking in the street, buying groceries, asking directions, browsing in a bookstore, or waiting in line to enter a theater or a museum, Dorothy Day was constantly noticing people, constantly ready to engage with them and let them become, even for a few moments, part of her life.

How I wish that sentence, from Robert Coles's *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Addison-Wesley), had been recorded, then transmitted on headphones, as subliminal brainwashing during slumber, into the ears of writer John Wells and director Michael Rhodes before they made *Entertaining Angels*, the new motion picture about the woman who cofounded the *Catholic Worker* and the Catholic Worker Movement. For, thanks to the performance of Moira Kelly, Dorothy exists on screen but nobody in her life does. A woman who drove herself to live for others ends up as a magnetic movie heroine surrounded by posturing stereotypes. And, of course, when you diminish Dorothy Day's world, you diminish Dorothy Day.

Let our heroine, during her Greenwich Village Bohemian days, enter a smoky tavern and there they all are, the legendary radicals of the twenties and thirties. The camera seems to crash around just behind these young actors wearing period clothes, and they themselves crash around, banging tables, chairs, and beer mugs and announcing one another's names at full volume—Mike Gold! Floyd Dell! Are these stentorian introductions meant to penetrate the ignorance of the uninitiated, who won't know or care that these are two of the editors of the Socialist paper, *The Masses*? Surely most literate people will recognize the name Eugene O'Neill, but he gets an introduction anyway when the camera swings over to a dark Irishman glowering Byronically behind a black moustache, and an off-screen voice (Dell's? Gold's?) announces, "Eugene O'Neill! America's most infamous playwright!" It's a bit like the "Ed Sullivan Show" whenever the host introduced celebrities sitting in the audience. Let's really hear it, folks, for America's Most Infamous Playwright!

We also get to meet Day's lovers: Lionel Moise, who's supposed to be a hard guy but here comes across as just another Hollywood pretty boy; and Forster Batterham as depicted by Lenny Von Dohlen, who has a monotonous voice and a spacey gaze but not a scintilla of the smouldering rage shading into nihilism that probably both attracted and repelled Day.

And then there are the spiritual influences on Day's life: Peter Maurin, a French peasant and autodidact of Whitmanesque proportions but here played by Martin Sheen with such cutsey owlishness (and an accent straight from the land of Maurice Chevalier impersonators) that I couldn't decide if a Stalinist ice pick or a fascist firing squad should be the proper reward for such a performance; and the usually engaging Melinda Dillon makes a spunky nun who ignites Day's interest in the homeless just as obnoxious as show-biz spunky nuns usually are. Only the superb veteran actor Brian Keith, in the stooge role of a recalcitrant bishop ("What do you say we remove the *Catholic* from *Catholic Worker*, Dorothy?"), endows his character with a sense of reality, with the texture of a life lived.

Worst of all, the poor are stereotyped. Dorothy Day had no use for "the faceless masses"; she tried to help one individual after another and delighted in idiosyncrasy. But all this movie can do with the needy is to put actors in dirty clothes and have them gesticulate pathetically, wag their heads humbly, and stop just short of pulling their forelocks. In fact, all the supporting parts in this movie are cardboard figures, mere feeders of cues to the lead actress, Moira Kelly.

To be sure, Ms. Kelly delivers. Her characterization is a blend of Celtic charm, transfixing gravity, justified rage, pathetic neediness, and inexhaustible compassion. Her voice needs development and, in the framing scenes set in the 1960s, she is nothing but a young actress with a white wig on her head. But for the most part Kelly supplies all the emotions the script demands of her even when the script itself is inept. Her performance reaches its peak in the scene in which Day, her charitable work apparently capsized, wends her way back to Mike Gold at his editorial office and tries to convince him and herself that she's ready to return to professional journalism. In one lengthy close-up, Kelly suggests that the near-despair she

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feels is like a boulder crushing the life out of her. But then, midway through the close-up, Kelly seems to stare into her despair; not able yet to push it away, she's content to watch it and live with it, as if it were a boresome guest who mustn't be shown the door. It's a remarkable moment in a remarkable performance.

The script by John Wells is second-rate TV writing. It repeatedly "cuts to the chase" with no interesting detours for the sake of characterization, texture, or ideas. It's packed with all the incidents that you expect to find in any movie about young radicals: soup lines, marches, riots, free love, truncheon-wielding cops, *et al.* But consider the following episode from Day's autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*: "We rented it [a horse] from a German Nazi on East Sixteenth Street, and sometimes when we had no money he let us have the use of it free for a few hours. It rejoiced our hearts to move a Jewish family into their new quarters with his equipment."

How true to life that passage is in its sense of the goodness that can survive an otherwise twisted nature, and in its sense of the overall complexity and absurdity that occur when ideologies encounter reality. And this is precisely the sort of incident for which Wells's script has no use.

The direction by Michael Rhodes also smacks of television: all functionalism, no savoring of life, no sense of beauty, no ambition to jolt the viewer with an unexpected viewpoint or perspective. For instance, when Dorothy seeks out Maurin, reduced to aphasic wandering by a stroke, she searches an alleyway in a slum. She starts in the upper left of the screen and proceeds in a diagonal down to the bottom right. And guess where Maurin is lying. James Agee wrote of John Huston's movies that "they open the eye and require it to work vigorously; and through the eye they awaken curiosity and intelligence." The direction of this film never opens the eye and therefore puts the mind to sleep.

May I press some unsolicited (and probably unwanted) advice on Paulist Pictures, the backer of this project? If you really want to make a good Catholic movie, forget about Catholic subjects or Catholic "properties." Find some gifted young Catholic writer-director who is God-obsessed. Ask him or her to deliver a script. If you approve of the result, turn him loose to direct it. The only great recent Catholic film I know is *Black Robe* and it was directed by the same man who made the only great recent Protestant movie, *Tender Mercies*. I don't know if Bruce Beresford is at all religious but he found great scripts by two men who have devout natures, Horton Foote (*Mercies*) and Brian Moore (*Black Robe*), and he perfectly expressed their highly idiosyncratic visions of the life of the soul. Paulist Pictures might well take some inspiration from Beresford's example.

In other words, do with film what Dorothy Day did with the necessities. Help the individual. □

The face of Dorothy Day appearing on our cover is the work of Charles Wells. The sculpture, carved in oak, was dedicated on October 12, 1996 at the La Salle University Art Gallery in Philadelphia. It is the gift of Judith and Dennis O'Brien in honor of Brother Daniel Burke, former president of the university.

MEDIA

Frank McConnell

'GENESIS' II

Redactor missing in action

I have told you the good news about "Genesis: A Living Conversation" (*Commonweal*, October 11, 1996). The bad news is a little more complicated, but just as much a part of this rather extraordinary series.

The first problem with "Genesis" is its selection of participants. There are many distinguished and fascinating players on the team: What a pleasure to see, for instance, the reclusive John Barth, one of our grandest novelists (*The Sot-weed Factor*, *Chimera*), on the show discussing the Cain and Abel story. But, for all the brilliance of his fiction, does Barth really belong here? Does the painter Hugh O'Donnell? Or the novelists Mary Gordon and Oscar Hijuelos? Or Elizabeth Swados, whose distinction is that she composed the rather sappy theme music for the series?

I'm not getting personal here (although Swados, on the show about Abraham and Sarah in Egypt, does establish a bottom line of irrelevance for the series). The point is that reading Genesis *should* be a part of everyone's experience; but that a conversation about Genesis should include as many truly skilled readers as possible. Too often, discussions of the day's episode—especially with the nonexperts—lead to bland ramblings that begin, "Well what the story says to *me*..." or "See, what *I* think Sarah is feeling here...." That may be very well for suburban Bible study groups, but not here. This essential text should not be masqueraded as user-friendly: that *is* McMidrash.

The great number of participants, of course, from four central religions, are as learned and as eloquent as one could wish. But it's bothersome to consider the names that are *not* on the team roster: Harold Bloom, John S. Dunne, Richard Friedman, Jack Miles, Fazlur Rahman, James Robinson—the list goes on.

And that objection is subsumed by a larger one. For a century now, responsible exegesis has been based on the fact—that's fact—that Genesis is a compilation, a sort of gumbo, of three very different and sometimes contradictory texts, called J (Yawhistic), E (Elohistic), and P (Priestly), which were stirred into the same pot around 450 B.C. by a mysterious figure—who *was* that masked man?—called the "Redactor." This truth in no way diminishes the authority of the text as "sacred"; to the contrary, trying to read the Bible seriously without

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knowing this is like trying to do physics without knowing calculus.

Nevertheless, the "documentary hypothesis," as it's called, scares the hell out of fundamentalists—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim alike. And "Genesis," the series, never once brings it up—although everybody involved, surely, knows better. It's TV, folks, and we don't want to alarm anybody out there who may be a fundamentalist *and* a PBS subscriber. Still, it's embarrassing: seven folks sit around reconciling the first creation story (God made everything in seven days) with the second (God formed man from clay in the garden), and nobody just points out that they needn't be reconciled, because they were written by two different people (the first is P, the second J) with vastly different agendas, who didn't even use the same word for—or have strictly the same concept of—"God."

This is part and parcel of the same evasiveness that informs the sequence of episodes. Why do we begin with the story of Cain and Abel ("The First Murder") and *then* begin at the beginning, in episode two, with the priestly creation? Because murder is a lot sexier than "Let there be light," of course: but do we *need* that? Is anybody tuning in "Genesis: A Living Conversation" likely to expect the wham-bam quick fix of, say, "NYPD Blue"?

Ditto with the initial performers. But their narrations, remarkably for a series called "Genesis," are not *from* Genesis: they're paraphrases—close paraphrases, but paraphrases for all that. You have to assume that this is out of a desire not to offend anyone by picking a text not that of their own tradition, and this is partly admirable, but partly wrong. It's precisely the quality of a sacred text—Torah, the Gospels, the Qur'an—that it does give offense, as no mere novel, however great, can, and that it forces us to wrestle with its words, just as Jacob wrestled with the Dark One from the Elohim, for a blessing. These are stories—the series gets that splendidly right—and it is in stories, rather than in philosophy, that our ethical and religious life is born. But they are stories rooted in specific words, specific sentences—as are all stories—and it would have been better to use one consistent version (I'd vote for the Jerusalem Bible), if only to have a place to begin quarreling with the translation. What we have instead is Genesis Lite.

And Genesis only. My largest complaint about the series is its howling lack of closure. Of the five books of Torah, the first two are obviously a single narrative, an artistic whole despite the contradictory sources out of which it is woven. Reading Genesis without reading Exodus is like listening to the first two movements of Beethoven's Ninth, and skipping the last two. Perhaps PBS plans to follow this series with one of Exodus. Or perhaps Exodus—which completes and consolidates the epic of the formation of Israel—is a little too risky for a company that, after all, is at the funding mercy of our increasingly Gingrichian/Christian government. Either way, it's a pity. So much breath is wasted in this series about who God is, what God's like. When you read the first two books of the Tanakh (the Hebrew Scriptures) as a unit, you know what he's like. From Eden on, he's a creator who gave his creation autonomy, who is sometimes angered at that autonomy, and who's trying just to work out a way of getting along with his creation without anybody getting hurt or upset: trying to find the right covenant. Anybody who's ever had a sixteen-year-old in the house will feel deeply for Yahweh. And every failed agreement in Genesis finds its perfection in the Sinai covenant, with Moses, in Exodus. You do this for me, and I'll do this for you. And you will *not* stay out past one-thirty on Saturday night. Agreed?

The discussions in PBS's "Genesis," brilliant as they often are, are crippled just because they don't get to look to the end of the story—which is also, of course, the real beginning of Israel.

So it is a series noble in conception and intention, and flawed, though not fatally so, in execution. A little too smarmy, a little too politically correct, a little too nice-nelly about what may be the most uncompromising text in the world except for Homer's *Iliad*.

For all that, "Genesis" is a real triumph for TV and for the idea of TV. I've written a thousand words about what's good about "Genesis," and another thousand about what isn't. I'd be sorry if the second half outweighed the first. This production is a hint about what really splendid TV could be. It would be an impoverishment to miss it. □

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Moderator:
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Go to jail, go directly to jail

The Oxford History of the Prison
The Practice of Punishment in Western Society
Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, editors
Oxford University Press, $39.95, 489 pp.

Charles R. Morris

About 3 million people are currently incarcerated in the United States, and more than 10 million are received into American jails each year. More than a third of American black men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine are under some form of criminal jurisdiction—on probation, on parole, in jail or prison.

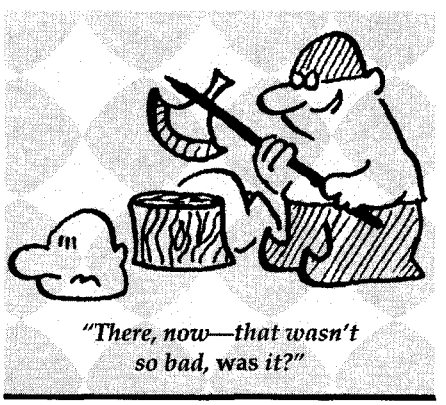
Winston Churchill's 1910 dictum, that the treatment of crime and criminals was "one of the most unfailing tests of the civilization of any country," is therefore more true of the United States than he could have imagined. One of the authors in this volume estimates that over any ten-year period, fully one-fifth of the population may directly experience jail, and in some communities it is the unusual person who has not been in jail. Building, maintaining, and paying for prisons and jails has moved to the very top of the priority list for state and local governments.

Morris's and Rothman's timely book fills a great void in social scholarship. Although the prison has a long history in Western society, intellectuals have been drawn to it more as literary trope, à la Jean Genet and Norman Mailer, than as a subject of serious scholarship. Rothman's *The Discovery of the Asylum*, which appeared only a generation ago, was one of the very first solid works on the history of incarcerative institutions, if one excepts Michel Foucault's more famous, but fanciful, *Discipline and Punishment*. Morris, while not primarily a historian, may be the leading academic observer of the contemporary prison, and, over the course of more than three decades, has produced a rich lode of practical, empirical work.

The first, and longest, part of this book recounts in fascinating detail the history of official incarceration from ancient times to the present, culminating in a superb essay by Morris on the contemporary American maximum security prison. At Morris's behest, an Illinois prisoner, Simon Gutierrez, kept a detailed diary of a single day of prison routine that captures perfectly the tedium, the noise, and the constant struggle to build a cocoon of physical and psychic privacy within the raw, crowded, volatile mass.

The second half of the book, "Themes and Variations," is less successful. Although the essays are individually interesting, the spread of topics is so vast—from the Australian prison colonies, through the prison in literature, to a world history of political prisons—that it inevitably lacks the coherence of the first section.

The modern penal system is a palimpsest of reform movements over the centuries, springing from intentions that are variously humane, severe, or vengeful. A broad-scale American movement toward using prisons for punishment—as opposed to, say, merely holding debtors so they could not flee their debts—coincided with the era of Jacksonian democracy. It was motivated in part by the desire to replace the lashings and executions that characterized traditional justice regimes, but mostly as an engine of Republican moral reform. A century later, the creation of the "Big House" reflected the Progressive Era's faith in centralization and bureaucratic efficiency.



"There, now—that wasn't so bad, was it?"

The crudest theories of society and behavior, of Freudian psychology, of choice-making and moral development, have been pressed into service in the interest of "reform" and "rehabilitation." The gathering of so many people of demonstrated moral deficiency under one convenient roof has proven irresistibly attractive to social and psychological engineers of every stripe.

The very worst cruelties are inflicted for the sake of the prisoner's betterment. The "separate system" pioneered in nineteenth-century Pennsylvania kept prisoners in total isolation—new prisoners wore masks as they were conducted to their cells, and speaking aloud was punished with an iron gag. The treadmill system of the Victorian prison—up to ten hours a day turning a giant hamster wheel—was for the sake of imbuing habits of order and discipline. Anectin, a drug that creates the experience of suffocation, was used for aversive conditioning purposes in California until the 1970s.

On the other hand, a haphazard post-1960s movement to eliminate internal constraints created an unprecedented wave of prisoner-on-prisoner violence,

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and in many states a shift of institutional control to gangs. Violence seems to have abated in recent years as officials have gradually reasserted control, and perhaps also because of a pronounced shift to more minority, and more female, staff. But maximum security prisons and big-city jails remain overcrowded, sullen, uncomfortably dangerous places. Truly horrific rates of AIDS have penal officials in a state of quiet panic.

If a lesson emerges from Morris's and Rothman's book it is humility. The reality of the prison is nonideological. Crime rates are probably an epiphenomenon of social and demographic disruption, and not materially affected by levels of imprisonment. But there are many very dangerous people in prison, and the rest of us are safer for it. Probably far too many people serve time for nonviolent offenses, but prisons are statistical quicksands, and plea-bargaining makes the offense of record a poor index of what a prisoner actually did. The wildly disproportionate rate of imprisonment of blacks is, at some deep level, a legacy of American racism. But most of the difference in white-black imprisonment rates, some 80 percent, according to Morris, is explained by the greater severity of black offenses against persons.

It is absurd to expect an agency such as a prison to become an instrument of reform and personal rehabilitation. And since the likelihood of imprisonment for any specific offense is infinitesimally low, it is foolish to expect them to have much deterrence value. Prisons incarcerate—that's all—but may be the only solution for dangerous offenders. An ethical society will not employ that weapon heedlessly, and will ensure that incarceration is minimally decent and safe. Morris and Rothman illuminate the tortuous path we have traveled toward that objective and the very long, and very expensive, road that is yet to go. □

Charles R. Morris *was director of institutions, including adult prisons, in Washington State in the 1970s. His history of the American Catholic church will be published next spring.*

PG-13

Sin and Censorship
The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry
Frank Walsh
Yale University Press, $35, 394 pp.

Seeing and Believing
Religion and Values in the Movies
Margaret R. Miles
Beacon Press, $25, 240 pp.

Michael O. Garvey

From the beginning, Christians have been justifiably nervous about images, because images can as easily distract as assist anyone who seeks the face of God. I may be prejudiced, but it seems to me that the Catholic and Orthodox traditions have admirably demonstrated that the enjoyment of an artifact and the praising of God need not be contradictory activities, and can in fact be one and the same experience. "It is not too great toil," the ancient Celtic prayer says, "to praise the Trinity." Surely among the reasons for this is that the "toil" of divine praise is always marvelously lightened by the created splendor which God invites us both to perceive and to celebrate. At the risk of sounding a little defensive, I'd even go so far as to say that the Catholic church's famous censoriousness about motion pictures derives at least as much from this salubrious reverence for human imagination as from the Jansenist prudishness on which so many contemporary satirists rely.

It's not surprising when a Hollywood story reaches a breathtakingly fatuous conclusion—in this case, that in the matter of censorship "sometimes the cure can be worse than the disease"—but before permitting himself to write those words, University of Massachusetts history professor Frank Walsh, in *Sin and Censorship*, assembles a thorough and useful study chock full of embarrassing and often depressing instances of hierarchical foolishness, anti-Semitism, and institutional hubris. Jansenist prudishness certainly abounds in the inglorious history of the bishops' relationship with Hollywood, but even more striking is the almost triumphal anti-intellectualism of the ecclesiastical bureaucrats in the deservedly defunct Legion of Decency. My favorite example of this was the Legion's condemnation of *Strange Cargo*, that numinous 1940 film about an escape from Devil's Island during which several convicts, including one played by Clark Gable and a floozy played by Joan Crawford, encounter Christ in a mysterious fellow escapee named Cambreau. The Legion announced that it had condemned the film because of its "naturalistic concept of religion contrary to the teachings of Christ and the Catholic church."

As the American Catholic bishops came to enjoy the manner in which the developing American film industry could be made to grovel and jump through hoops for lucrative Legion of Decency ratings, an unprecedented opportunity to teach American Catholics about the sacredness of the human imagination sank without a trace in a welter of asinine arguments about double-entendres and exposed cleavage. Anyone who believes in God will acknowledge that one's choice of films—no less than of books, pictures, songs, jokes, meals, drinks, and companions—has a profound moral dimension and cosmic consequences. But if our bishops had spent much less time and energy attempting (and failing) to manipulate Hollywood capitalists and much more time trying to learn and teach Catholics about the twentieth century's most notable art form, the church in this country would have been far better served.

At the end of *Sin and Censorship*, there is a revealing account of a confrontation between demonstrators at a New York

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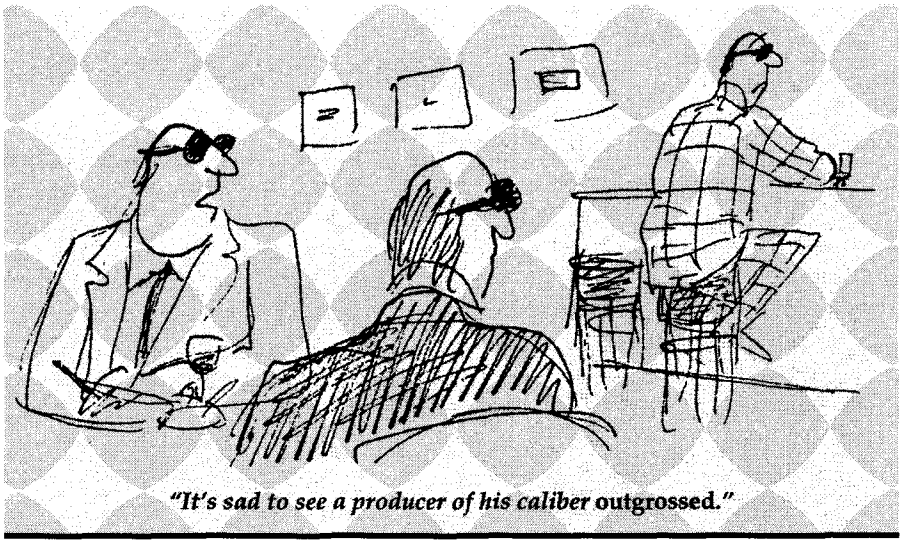
showing of Martin Scorsese's controversial movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. One demonstrator waved a sign reading "Blasphemy." A counterdemonstrator waved a sign reading "It's only a movie." You don't need to be an advocate of censorship to believe that the counterdemonstrator wouldn't recognize a blasphemy if he were starring in one.

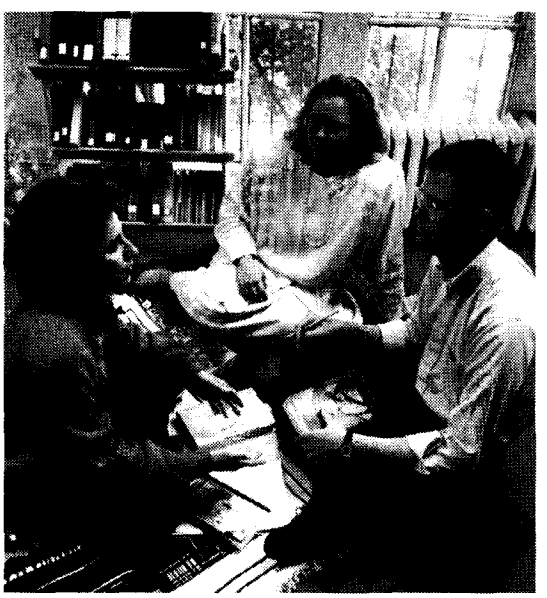
To be fair to her, Margaret Miles, who teaches historical theology at Harvard, would never argue that a movie is only a movie. In fact, her *Seeing and Believing* suggests a commendable scholarly conviction that nothing is ever "only" anything. Still, all these intriguing essays on a massive subject—the interaction between movies and prayer ("religious experience," as she calls it)—are hampered by a rigidly contemporary perspective.

If I and other ordinary churchgoing filmviewers sound as goofy to Miles and other ordinary academic agnostics as she sounds to me, it may simply be a matter of upbringing. She writes about being raised among Christians who condemned graven images as idolatrous and allowed only the bleakest collection of visual images to be seen, if not enjoyed, by children. This reminded me of the wonderful day in the second grade at Christ the King School when I imagined, drew, and colored a lurid depiction of the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence, toothily smiling as the coals roasted his flesh. Sister Mary Antoinette praised my picture to the skies, displayed it on the bulletin board, put a gold star on it, and gave me a Hershey Bar before I went home.

I wonder what Professor Miles would have thought about my picture. If, as parts of her book indicate, she suffers



"It's sad to see a producer of his caliber **outgrossed.**"



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from a sluggish appreciation of religious experience and a tin ear for religious voice, she certainly has a high standard for religious art, flunking both *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Jesus of Montreal* as religious films. "To use the word religious with substantive content in the context of representations of Jesus' life and death," she says, "demands we acknowledge the history of the devotional use of religious images. On these grounds, both films fail to inspire imitation of their protagonist, or even to communicate clearly what such imitation might look like or feel like." That's a severe standard indeed. Few Sunday Masses can meet it.

But we ought to be grateful to Miles for recording such things as the critical response of the *New Orleans Review* to the martyrdoms concluding the memorable 1986 film, *The Mission*. The film, as most *Commonweal* readers will remember, concerns the destruction of the eighteenth-century Jesuit *reductions* in Paraguay, and the witnesses of two doomed missionaries among a doomed Guarani native population. One of the priests is killed while presiding at the Eucharist, and the other dies leading the Guarani in an armed resistance. As if to illustrate what the church is up against in the late twentieth century, John Mosier wrote in the *New Orleans Review*, "if this is moral history, it's hard to see what the subject is." I agree with Miles's suggestion that a more historically accurate ending for *The Mission* (one in which the Jesuit priests agree to abandon the *reductions* in order to avert the massacre of the Guarani people) would have made it a far more interesting movie, but viewers like Mosier would have been even more deeply confused.

Even a terminal academic like Miles can possess a keen and ingenuous eyesight. She is intrigued by the manner in which religious belief manifests itself in popular culture, and her fascination is often contagious. I hope it continues to deepen and that she writes more and more about it. I wonder if she's seen *Dead Man Walking*? □

Michael O. Garvey *is the author of* Finding Fault *(Thomas More Press).*

THE UNFORGIVEN

The Statement
Brian Moore
Dutton, $22.95, 250 pp.

J. V. Long

On the morning I finished Brian Moore's powerful new novel, *The Statement*, Paul Touvier's obituary appeared in the newspaper. Touvier, an official in the Vichy regime during the Second World War, died in prison—the only Frenchman ever convicted of "crimes against humanity." His story was more than usually toxic, since he had been sheltered in Roman Catholic religious communities and monasteries during the years he was in hiding. In addition, not long before Touvier's unlamented death, Abbé Pierre, an old priest revered throughout France for his work with the poor, beat a retreat to an Italian Benedictine monastery in response to the outcry that met his support of a book, written by a friend, that challenged the authenticity of the Holocaust.

In *The Statement*, Brian Moore once again (as he did in *The Color of Blood* and *No Other Life*) displays his sixth sense for isolating the most vulnerable points of contact between human affairs and divine providence as it is mediated through the all-too-human functionaries of the Catholic church. Moore builds his narrative on some of the architecture of Paul Touvier's life, creating an evil web of complicities among men who act as if they can revive the old certainties that once secured France for Catholics and Caucasians. Then he shows how fragile a web can be.

Pierre Brossard, a cagy septuagenarian, has been on the lam for almost twenty years. At the behest of sympathetic church authorities, the Élysée Palace had engineered a pardon for Brossard's wartime crimes. However, the consequent publicity opens new avenues of investigation that jeopardize others whose respectability and comfort, unlike Brossard's, have never been compromised by their behavior during the war. Brossard is indicted for ordering the deaths of fourteen Jews at Dombey—a crime against humanity for which there is no statute of limitations, and both the government and the church recognize it is time to pull the plug on an embarrassing episode. At the same time, Brossard is apparently being hunted by a Jewish commando unit impatient with the pace of conventional justice. When it is clear that they are acting on inside information, Brossard feels a new kind of pressure and calls in his chips from every pocket of the reactionary conspiracy that has sustained him in his internal exile.

Suddenly the catacombs—the "underground" sanctuaries that, ironically in this novel, hide the murderer rather than the prey—are perilous. With the forces of the modern church in alliance with the state's system of justice (significantly represented by the *gendarmerie*, not by the regular police), Brossard's confidence wanes and in the impenetrable murkiness of his heart he pursues a kind of forgiveness, as well as a way out of his predicament. "*Ego te absolvo.* Those words, the most joyous in religion....Confession was the greatest sacrament of the church, a passport out of the flames of hell." Brossard is a narcissist. He is assuaged by the words of absolution and undeterred by the expectation of reform. He has been cosseted and financially supported by sympathetic abbots, minor ecclesiastical functionaries, and an anti-Semitic, revanchist "order," the *Chevaliers de Ste. Marie*. They all share Brossard's embittered memories "'of the church as it was in France when we were boys. It was a church that saw modern society as an insult against God's laws, a church that was antidemocratic, filled

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with clerics and laymen who would think of you [Brossard] as the victim of a plot by those Jews, freemasons, Communists, whom we were taught to fear and despise.'" For all of his running, Brossard is most a fugitive from the truth.

His hatred for Jews, racial minorities, and anything progressive has created an inner life so knotted that all connection to the truth has been abrogated. When he was sentenced to death in absentia immediately after the war, he was forced into petty criminality. When finally arrested, he betrayed old friends and, in exchange, was allowed to escape. The police clearly recognized someone whose moral flexibility would be of much greater service to them on the streets than in prison. Brossard has no concept of the imprisonment his freedom entails and continues to act the Judas, as required.

Brossard breathes an air so thick with betrayals that his instincts for survival eventually suffocate. Where one might expect moral light, Brossard finds insipid priests, who only in the face of indisputable realities admit the possibility of previous excesses. About the death camps, Brossard's confessor, Monsignor LeMoyne, reflects, "The numbers of dead are exaggerated, no doubt, but what matter? Sin is sin in any number." The monsignor is as facile at forgiving himself—and, by implication, all those who acted in "good faith" by collaborating with the German occupiers—as he is tireless in trying to secure forgiveness, whether sacramental or civil, for his protégé.

Brossard, however, is unforgivable. In Moore's telling, his penitence is as vain as the church's forgiveness.

Perfidy abounds in this novel: in Rome and Paris, in the highest echelons of government, and in monastic enclosures. *The Statement* is played out in the shadows. Survival—for those pursued by the truths of history, including those allegedly sensitive to the consequences of Judgment—depends upon prevarication and masquerade. □

J.V. Long *lives in Portland, Oregon, and is a doctoral candidate in English at Stanford University.*

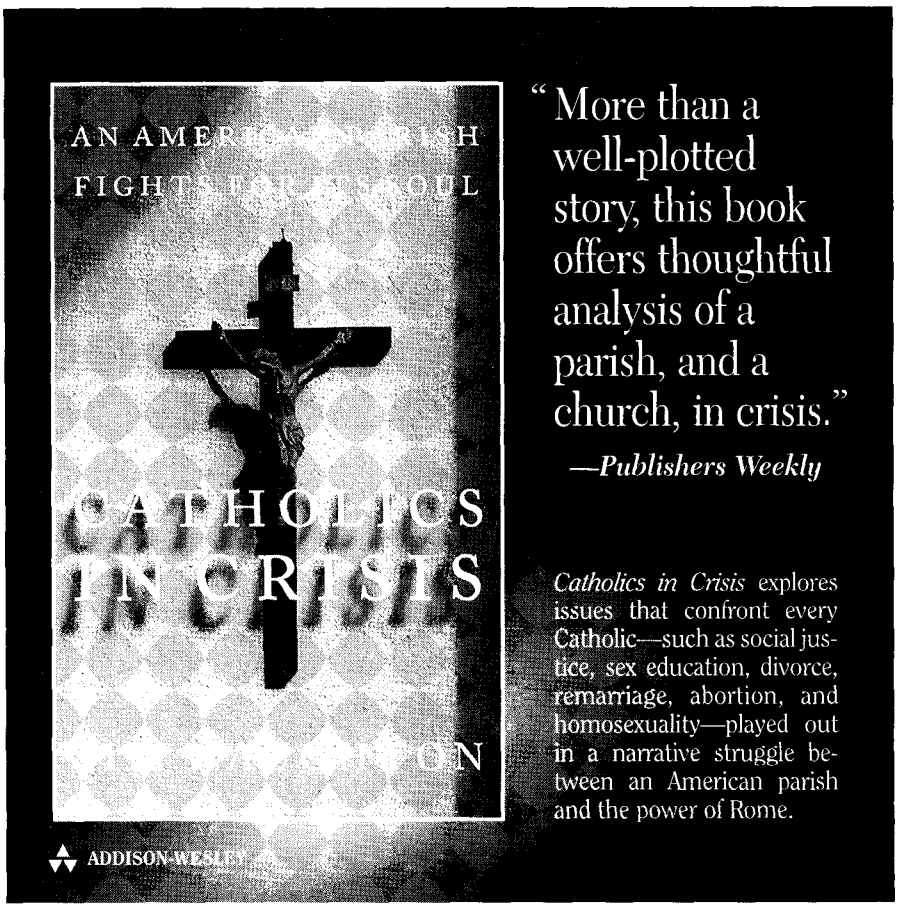
THIS DYING FLESH

Master of Death
The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator
Michael Camille
Yale University Press, $40, 296 pp.

F. González-Crussi

That "dolorous age," said Jules Michelet of the Middle Ages, and since then a singular, morbid proclivity has impelled artists and post-Romantic nonconformists to heave periodic sighs of nostalgia for that turbulent era. Paul Verlaine contrasted the "enormous and delicate" medieval epoch with his own, a nineteenth century which he saw possessed "of carnal spirit and sad flesh." More than a hundred years later, the flesh remains ever so sad, and the spirit, mired in consumerism and material comfort, no less carnal. It is thus perfectly natural that we feel intimidated by medieval excess; that we feel uneasy when we canvass a period of history that sanctioned public displays of arrant brutality, and in which quarterings, beheadings, dismemberings, live burials, and burnings at the stake were commonplace; that we experience discomfort at the recitation of massive epidemics that mowed entire villages, countries, or continents.

What did people think whose relation with the great reaper was so disturbingly close? Traditionally, historians endeavored to seek an answer through the interpretation of written texts and not, until recently, via a systematic explo-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CATHOLICS
IN CRISIS
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ration of the images that the past has handed down to us. Michael Camille's *Master of Death* is a comprehensive study of the life and works of Pierre Remiet, medieval book illuminator. Book illustration in the Middle Ages obeyed very different determinants, and served altogether different purposes, from those we are familiar with today.

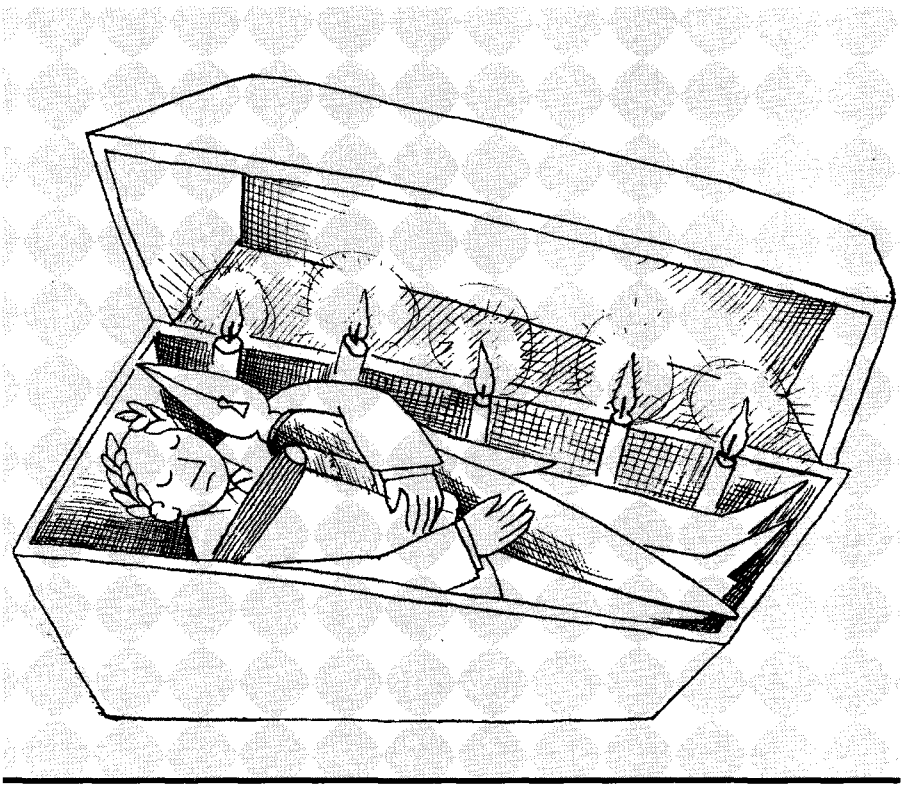
Illustrators, it seems, did not draw on the book pages those complex motifs of intertwined vines, acacia leaves, and grotesque little figures simply to serve as ornament. Nor was their task confined to providing a concrete visual embodiment of the written text. Rather, the space "on the edge" of the text was often used by the illustrator to make a personal statement. This could be a textual commentary along the lines of perfect religious orthodoxy, or an entirely idiosyncratic interpretation, or a satirical, irreverent, and sometimes shocking exegesis. Thus, in a previous book, *Image on the Edge*, Camille calls attention to a human figure drawn on the margin of a religious text, that flashes a naked bottom and seems engaged in wild antics, while his facial appearance looks disturbingly like that of Christ. In *Master of Death*, the author makes us ponder his statement that illustrations may be likened to "complex systems of thought," and that they require as much poetic sensibility to be interpreted as the text itself. By his own assertion, Camille's work has hinged entirely upon the relationships that exist between words and images; and it is difficult to think of anyone better prepared for the task of "reading" visual messages from the troubled, or in Barbara Tuchman's expression, "calamitous," medieval past.

The reader is told, at the outset, that Remiet passes for an undistinguished artist. He is not rated among the top exponents of his craft by connoisseurs of medieval art. But the very fact of his alleged mediocrity recommends him to the historian. For a great artist breaks with all norms and, in a way, seems to exist outside time, whereas an "ordinary maker" is enormously informative to historical investigation, precisely "because he is rooted in a world he can never transcend." Remiet, in other words, is representative of his times, and Camille points out that his times had more in common with our own, than the more recently departed nineteenth century.

It is not common to say of a learned treatise in the history of art that the author identifies himself with his personage. But the deep, genuine involvement of Camille with the life and works (the two, we are told, were synonymous in that venerable era) of Pierre Remiet is glaringly manifest. Remiet comes alive in the first chapter, where he is depicted in his little Parisian shop on the Rue de la Parcheminerie, facing the church of Saint Séverin, all redolent of the animal skins being prepared in the neighboring houses for the illuminator to exert his art upon them. Remiet's presence is strongly felt as each subsequent chapter depicts and lovingly discusses the surviving samples of his handiwork.

The body of work of Pierre Remiet is called "lifeless" in the book's subtitle, not in a derogatory way, but to emphasize and to "celebrate its reality, traced within and from the body of a historical subject." In other words, it is lifeless in the sense that the French call *nature morte* a great painting of "still life." The subject of death is variously represented, but always forcefully, suffused with religious sentiment, and always adverting to a future life that is to come, in the resplendent tradition of Christianity. No one had yet intimated that "God is dead"; and death was still representable: no one had yet invented the means to kill, as is now possible, on massive scale and leaving no trace. And so powerful and moving was Remiet's life work that, had his name been lost to posterity, Camille opines, he should have been known as Master of Death, in the style of other unnamed medieval artists.

The books of the wealthy, in the Middle Ages, had covers ornamented with rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones. They could also be provided with clasps, which could be locked: The bound volume was thus likened to a treasure chest. Opening *Master of Death*, like the books illuminated by Pierre Remiet, gives the impression of penetrating a treasure vault. In either case, "one cannot just flick through its contents." It is difficult to survey the richness of ideas developed by the author. *Master of Death* is a work of admirable



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scholarliness. The ample annotations, bibliography, and comprehensive catalogue of the illustrations give an idea of the daunting task undertaken by Camille, whose engaging style and peerless erudition are everywhere in evidence. The book has close to two hundred technically excellent figures, many in color. Unfortunately, some were reproduced at too small a scale, so that the reader has difficulty appreciating their details. □

F. González-Crussi *is a pathologist at Children's Hospital in Chicago. His most recent book is* Suspended Animation: Six Essays on the Preservation of Bodily Parts *(Harcourt, Brace & Co.).*

STRANGER THAN FICTION

Haiti, History, and the Gods
Joan Dayan
University of California Press, $35, 339 pp.

John P. Hogan

To know Haiti is to be obsessed by the place. Joan Dayan, a Haitian-American professor of English at the University of Arizona, clearly admits to her obsession. She sets out to chart the "cultural imagination" of the first black republic and to a great extent succeeds in her creative anthropological examination of race, religion, and gender in colonial Haiti. It is almost as if she had diagnosed Haiti's (and everyone's?) original sins and then reconstructed a genesis story to explain their painful contemporary presence. But indeed, she doesn't need to create a myth, she simply recounts the often gruesome history.

Her examination, while offering no conclusions, allows for "conflict and collision" and seeks "to dramatize a complex and perplexing social history too often lost in exposition." Dayan uses a multifaceted methodology, including careful historical, anthropological, and literary analysis. She paints a frightening portrait of colonial Haiti from legal and religious texts, memoirs, letters, and literary fiction.

Saint-Domingue, the French colonial name for Haiti, was the richest and most productive of France's colonies, and provided the impetus for many cultural innovations that shaped republican France, from race and religion to dress, jewelry, and food. The author also describes what happened when the impetus came the other way, "most notably, when Napoleon Bonaparte, wanting to re-institute slavery in his possessions, sent his best troops to Saint-Domingue in order to bring down Toussaint L'Ouverture and make sure no epaulette remained on any black shoulder."

Sensuality, romance, bondage, and despotism are woven through a quilt made up of pairs: black and white, slave and master, voodoo and Catholicism, virgin and prostitute. This methodological tool of *"doubling"* is pieced together from major Haitian writers. Indeed, *la politique de la doublure* frames the working out of personal and national identity from Toussaint, Christophe, and Petion to the Duvaliers.

Dayan is at her best in part 2, "Fictions of Haiti." Against a backdrop of Senghor, Cesaire, Fanon, and Zora Neale Hurston, she examines Haiti's tales of "land, women, and gods." She concentrates on the novels of Marie Chauvet, "perhaps the greatest writer of Haitian fiction." Voodoo is the hermeneutical thread throughout the quilt, Catholicism the blunt and destructive needle.

From the earliest days of the republic, voodoo, race, gender, and nation have been intertwined. The author quotes from Jacques-Stephen Alexis's *Les Arbres Musiciens*: "The *lwa* (voodoo spirits) were amalgamated to the body of the nation, they fertilized the land like the male fertilizes the female!" Land for sex is a consistent theme. Male jealousy in the face of the grueling labor of women subsistence farmers and small land owners is crudely sexualized by René Depestre: "Every woman has a karo (3.3 acres) of land between her legs."

That voodoo and Catholicism are interwoven in Haiti is apparent. However, it is difficult to get clear insights into an amalgamation that defies explanation. In rural areas, Catholic rituals and songs, the lives of Christ and the saints, as well as sacraments and sacramentals were "eagerly adopted by those forbidden the opportunity to become familiar with Christian doctrine."

Dayan claims that voodoo practices "must be viewed as ritual reenactments of Haiti's colonial past," rather than simply holdovers from African religious practices. Authors as diverse as François Duvalier and Jacques Roumain, and virtually all of Haiti's women, writers, as well as Dayan herself, present voodoo as a way of rationalizing, and maybe as a way out of, life's daily miseries. The "logic of voodoo" has provided a soothing ointment against the racism and sexism of Haiti's blood-soaked history.

The church remained a foreign institution tolerant of slavery and thereby earned the contempt of the masses. However, for the uneducated the lives of the saints, sacraments, and rituals became purveyors of other beliefs—and other gods. Superficial efforts at Catholic religious education provided the opportunity for the Saint-Domingue black population to revitalize the religion of "Rada, Congo, Ibo, or Naga spirits" brought over on the slave ships. This homegrown reconstruction provided, and for many still provides, something of an intelligibility structure in the face of suffering and oppression.

Dayan points out that in the colonial period, blacks, whether slaves or emancipated, were more religious than most whites. Their syncretistic religion generated "a belief system of unprecedented resilience." How the *lwa* meet Jesus

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or how the Virgin Mary meets *Ezili Freda* is still the topic of much debate; the resilience is not.

Zombis, the "epistemology of whiteness," the "onomastics of color," and the history of bizarre mathematical tabulations to measure racial composition will appear arcane to many readers. But the light Dayan shines on race, gender, and religion illumines the path from the slave trade to the drug trade to the boat people.

The author was right to warn the reader from the beginning not to expect "a unified point of view." Rather, she tells the same story three ways: using ritual, fiction, and history. This work is not for those unfamiliar with Haitian history and culture. However, for readers with some exposure to the country, it is an intriguing way to wander through Haiti's "cultural imagination."

True to her word, Dayan does not draw conclusions. After so many stories and so much detail, such reticence is somewhat frustrating for the reader. Nonetheless, Haitians, like all of us, are immigrants from the past. Many of the burning issues from Saint-Domingue still smolder today. The modern economy is as exploitative as the colonial plantation economy. Outside forces still manipulate Haitian events. Fear and suspicion of racial politics—whether French or American—run deep. Suspicion of U.S. policy can be traced from the Jefferson administration to the current flap over apparent U.S. support of Emmanuel Constant's FRAPH. The complex amalgamation of voodoo and Catholicism, complicated further by the split between the *Ti Legliz* and the hierarchy, remains a volatile issue. The exploitation of women, whether small farmers or those who stitch baseballs, continues at a galloping pace.

Dayan does hint at a kind of conclusion. Referring to the mutilation of Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines's corpse in 1806, she evokes a deeply felt mood of Haiti's past and present. The gory butchering of the emperor's dead body not only recorded a collective frenzy, she notes, but also registered the potential for transfiguration—a resurrection. "Such a hankering after resurrection, repeated and theatrical, still plagues Haiti, with each new hero, with each new government, with every dispensation."

One can only hope a new dispensation has begun. We should pray for a resurrection, but this time round, without a mutilation. □

John P. Hogan *was director of Catholic Relief Services in Haiti and has written frequently for* Commonweal.

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

Weigh the question

William Honnen takes Sidney Callahan [correspondence, September 27] to task for her "abandonment of all the critical issues" and for becoming a "one-issue right-to-lifer." Is it asking too much to concentrate on the predominant issue of a campaign over transitory issues? Isn't the sanctity of life of every living human being immeasurably more important than something like supply-side economics?

WILLIAM TALBOT
New York, N.Y.

Dialogue & tradition

Cardinal Bernardin's Common Ground project seems to have shocked some Catholic traditionalists [editorial, September 13; correspondence, September 27, October 11]. What need of dialogue if there is the traditional teaching of the magisterium? Conversion, not conversation, is the key to church unity.

"Tradition" is indeed the key to understanding church and magisterium, but one needs to be clear about the logic of tradition. I am moved to comment on the problematics of tradition because of my recent rereading of Alisdair MacIntyre's Gifford lectures: *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). Lord Gifford, speaking from the powerful intellectual milieu of the Scottish Enlightenment, decreed that the lecturers should "treat their subject [theology] as a strictly natural science, just as astronomy or chemistry is."

MacIntyre concludes that the rationalistic Enlightenment project set forth by Adam Gifford simply fails to understand moral and theological discourse. Moral and theological discourse do not share the "logic" of the natural sciences. This discrepancy between "rational" scientific assumptions and moral discourse has become an accepted modern dogma—and so much the worse for morals and theology. No one would expect the Gifford lecturers to agree and "advance" theology or moral philosophy because on those subjects there is no acceptable—that is, rational/scientific method.

As a counter to the Enlightenment (Encyclopedic) project—and the genealogy of morals that regards "morality" as only the Nietzschean "will to power"—MacIntyre poses the method of "tradition," whose prime and virtually unique exemplar according to MacIntyre is Thomas Aquinas. Saint Thomas has, of course, been officially front and center for Catholic thought since he was proclaimed the preeminent Catholic philosopher by Leo XIII in *Aeterni patris* (1879). But the Catholic traditionalist who hopes to take comfort in MacIntyre's Saint Thomas should be forewarned: "Tradition" turns out to be anything but the definitive solution to present controversy.

MacIntyre sees Thomas as working within a "craft" conception of philosophy. A craft conception of philosophy is essentially traditional. Music exists as a craft tradition and as such is essentially tied to a tradition of artifacts and performance. One becomes a musician by initiation into the craft through working and reworking Bach, Mozart, *et al.* There is no music except through Bach, Mozart, *et seq.*

But, for all that tradition is essential in the craft of music, the modern composer does not reiterate the past; she composes from the past and creates something not yet heard. Music is essentially traditional and, as traditional, essentially open. Music is not

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closed, it is always only at "the state of the art."

No doubt the craft of music is quite different from the craft of philosophy (or theology) but the notion of working from a tradition is vastly important in understanding the role of tradition, dialogue, and dogma within the life of the church. MacIntyre constructs a view of Aquinas which makes him the prime exemplar of the craft tradition of philosophy, but MacIntyre's Thomas is not what emerged in the aftermath of *Aeterni patris*.

MacIntyre notes: "The single most important influence upon the drafting of *Aeterni patris* was [the German theologian Joseph] Kleutgen." Kleutgen failed to appreciate how late Scholasticism had more or less abandoned the essential role of historical tradition in the craft of philosophy. "Kleutgen treats Aquinas as presenting a finished system whose indebtedness to earlier writers is no more than an accidental feature of it....Aquinas was presented as....one more system confronting the questions of Cartesian and post-Cartesian epistemology [that is, rationalistic/scientific notions of philosophy]." Thomas is subtly transformed into a philosopher more keenly scientific and more rational than Descartes, Kant, and whomever else one hoped to refute from the modern array of savants and thinkers. But if Thomas really worked in a craft tradition, his method "required that his own work should be essentially incomplete. Aquinas's method cannot but be no more than the best answer reached so far."

I fear that the critics of the Bernardin committee, in their zeal to protect tradition, misunderstand the logic of tradition. There is a tradition of Christian practice, prayer, and philosophy. It is a complex, sometimes "contradictory" tradition (Abelard scandalized his twelfth-century contemporaries even more than Richard McBrien has in our day, by pointing out the *Sic et Non* of the church fathers). Tradition is essential to church and magisterium but because it is tradition it is "essentially incomplete." Tradition must be in dialogue because of its essential incompleteness. There is always the contemporary task, so mightily undertaken by Saint Thomas, of working in and from the tradition to define "the state of the art." That should be the guiding spirit of the Catholic Common Ground Project.

DENNIS O'BRIEN
Middlebury, Vt.

Ready to wed

An area neglected by Marian E. Crowe in her discussion of annulment [September 13] is that of "readiness." In my experience, a person who seeks an annulment may well have come to understand the difference between infatuation and love, between answering a call from God and running away from home, or seeking economic or emotional security, and may therefore believe in good faith that his or her marriage covenant was void, not alive in God's grace.

Perhaps more annulments are being granted because too little attention is given to marriage preparation. If both members of a couple know who they are, individually, and what kind of journey they are contemplating when they consider marriage, they will be better able to judge their own readiness.

Our parish offers a series of seven sessions for couples who are thinking of entering into marriage. They are guided into an opportunity to be more aware, more free, more ready to embark on a life-journey of mutual fidelity.

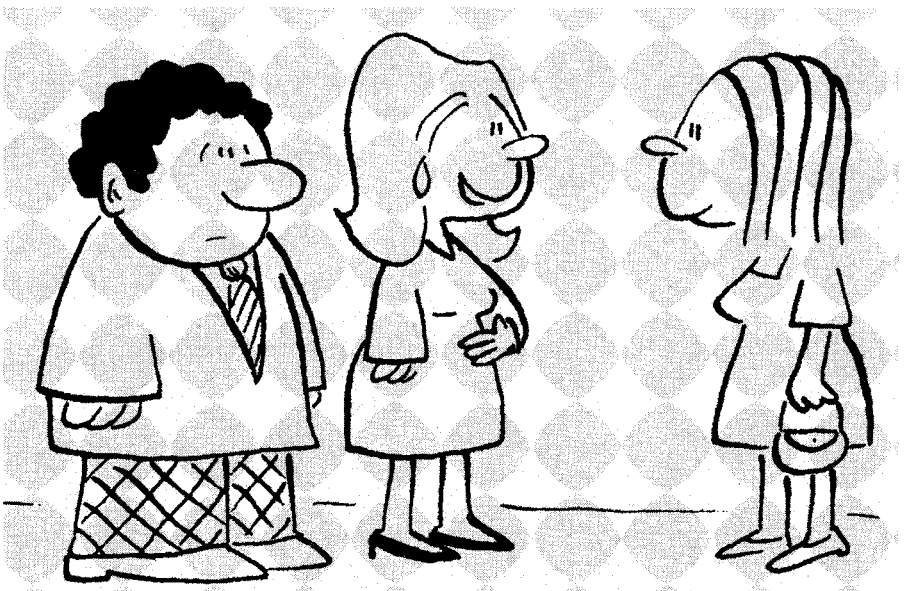
REV. KENNETH G. STOFFT
Roanoke, Va.

Shedding a pseudonym

In a recent column ["O'Connor on Quinn," September 13], Robert Hoyt refers to an article titled "Should the Council Look at Celibacy?" that appeared in the June 9, 1965 issue of *National Catholic Reporter*, written by a mysterious "Sacerdos Occidentalis."

Time to 'fess up: I'm the culprit. Though I gave *NCR* my name and address (it was in Charleston, South Carolina), I must have thought that writing about celibacy in the climate of the mid-'60s was risky enough to justify use of a pseudonym. I'm assured by Mr. Hoyt, who was *NCR*'s editor at the time, that I was right, judging by the abuse heaped on the paper for printing the piece.

After thirty years I still think we have to take another look at celibacy, and that the topic needs to be addressed at a high level of scholarship and spirituality, in a forum with some decision-making powers. In my view the option could be worked out



"...and this is my **incumbent** *husband."*

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"I didn't expect our divorce would be so amicable you'd still be here."

among diocesan priests and the various groups that fall between the diocesan and religious vocations. Old-time monastic orders and congregations would be expected to retain their charism of celibacy. (It's hard for me to imagine Mr. and Mrs. Trappist and their miniature monks engaging in contemplation while making fruit cakes.)

WILLIAM J. JOYCE, C.S.SP.
Bethel Park, Pa.

Old-time ignorance

Thank you for Peter Steinfels's excellent article ["The Pollsters Look at U.S. Catholics," September 13]. I was particularly enlightened by the news that whereas 59 percent of pre-Vatican II Catholics considered their religion the most important or among the most important parts of their lives, exactly half that many of postconciliar Catholics hold their religion in such high esteem.

But when Mr. Steinfels reports James D. Davidson's assertion that post-Vats know relatively little about their faith he gives the impression that their preconciliar predecessors were more knowledgeable about the Scriptures. One younger Catholic is quoted: "As far as the Bible goes, I couldn't tell you what's in the Old and New Testaments."

Of course my generation has a fund of terms: mortal and venial sin, holy days of obligation, confession, and the stations of the cross. But as a student in Catholic grammar and high schools in the diocese of Brooklyn, I never once saw a Bible in a classroom. But for a kindly heretic neighbor, who gave me a copy of the Rheims-Douay Bible, I might never have seen one.

If the Holy Bible had been on the Index of the Holy Office it could not have been less accessible to Catholics. It's remarkable that more of us didn't become curious enough to compensate for this lack—a lack, by the way, that I detect even in Catholic commentators on religious matters, some of them in your excellent magazine.

Only at age fifty did I decide to compensate for this educational shortfall. My subsequent twenty years of scriptural research have been rewarding indeed. I would highly recommend a similar course of action to anyone seriously interested in the basic tenets of our faith. After all, what harm can it do?

RICHARD GLEASON
Boulder, Colo.

Now tell the folks

To support some of the conclusions he reaches in his September 13 article "Rx for Ailing Parishes," Father Thomas Sweetser makes a leap of faith that deserves an Olympic gold medal. Although he may indeed have taken his own advice to "ask the folks," maybe now he should submit some of his recommendations to "the folks." This particular "folk," for one, doesn't go to church to find something he deliberately left at home. Nor does he expect the celebrant to behave like a neighbor waving as he passes by the front porch. As a presider over the momentous events about to take place, he should avoid any eye contact with me that would distract either of us from full participation in these events. Whatever friendly relationship he and I may enjoy at any other time, on this occasion I don't want him to be confused with one of my drinking buddies.

And as for "greeters" at the door, do they belong to the same union as "mourners" at the graveside?

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NOT YOUR MOMMA

Peter Feuerherd

Saturday, September 21, dawns gloriously in New York, the first day of autumn, when the hours of light and darkness are in perfect balance. But today I am to defy what the pop psychologists routinely call on men to do. No balance for me between my masculine and feminine sides. My calendar tells me it is going to be a male-bonding day, a time to revel in the glories of testosterone.

First, I spend the morning in my weekly ritual of basketball at Crowley Park in Elmhurst, Queens. I am part of a tribe of paunchy, middle-aged men who are weekend warriors in the "battle of the paint." As the sun rises over Queens, we are out there. And as in all male enterprises, there is clawing competition. Occasionally, an elbow connects with a face, and angry words pour forth. There are no referees, and disputes over foul calls generate the kind of passion not seen in this year's political debates. As I exit the court by late-morning, a particularly cantankerous opposing player offers me the one-fingered international sign of loathing. I take little offense. No harm, no foul. It is time to move on.

I am ready for some kinder, gentler male bonding as I ride the No. 7 train to Shea Stadium, the site of the first Promise Keepers gathering in New York. Promise Keepers is a largely Protestant evangelical organization devoted to getting men to accept Jesus, promote interracial harmony, and be responsible fathers and husbands. Its rallies have attracted more than 1.5 million participants across the country. Even though the group professes political neutrality, *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich has called them part of the vanguard of the Christian Right rearing the ugly head of male domination.

The rallies are all-male affairs. At this one, some 35,000 men, who paid sixty dollars apiece for the two-day rally, fill much of the giant horseshoe-shaped stadium located on Flushing Bay. The gathering has much of the same competitive feel I had experienced on the basketball court in the morning. The stadium erupts in cheers of "We Love Jesus, How About You?" with each section competing to see which can yell the loudest.

Exuberance is what Promise Keepers' rallies feature. Down on the stadium field, men are dancing—with each other—to the sound of a gospel beat. No room here for repressed, uptight, unsharing men. Despite feminist angst expressed about the Promise Keepers' philosophy, most of what I hear coming from the speakers' podium promotes understanding in the war between the sexes. A videotape depicts a husband, now converted to Promise Keepers, who confesses publicly to his sins of uncaring apathy in his marriage. His wife is happy about their newly energized conjugal bliss. They seem to be in the middle of a post-Promise-Keepers-happily-ever-after experience.

Evangelical pastor Bishop Wellington Boone from Richmond, Virginia, the author of *Your Wife Is Not Your Momma*, exhorts the men to pay attention to their spouses. As the early autumn sun begins to set, men are asked to share what good things they will do for their wives. They huddle in trios around the ballpark. A warm glow envelops Shea Stadium and me.

Of course, one can be critical. There seems to be no Catholic leadership and no Catholic speakers, a glaring omission in very Catholic New York. A "Messianic Jewish" singer offers disparaging remarks about his own background that border on the anti-Semitic. Prayers focus on men living in harmony with their wives, and ask for help for those still seeking a mate. Not much room here for vowed celibacy or men who feel called to the single state. Gays, it has been said about Promise Keepers, need not apply, although I don't hear any antihomosexual remarks this afternoon. While much of Bishop Boone's presentation is pro-wife, in this feminist age his constant reference to "handling" wives is jarring.

These caveats aside, there is something overwhelmingly positive about Promise Keepers. Rich and others have complained about what he calls the movement's reactionary antigay, antifeminist slant. But in this bitterly, racially divided society, what other venue brings together black men and white men in a warm, caring atmosphere? It is the kind of transracial solidarity that more liberal groups have largely abandoned or have never come close to achieving. If these guys can succeed in creating a world with more male responsibility and interracial understanding, it's hard to imagine that even the most knee-jerk critics could object.

As the sun sets at the end of my long male-bonding day, I leave Shea Stadium with a strong positive feeling about masculinity and Christianity. Unexpectedly, I find myself shedding my cynical journalist's pose and return home enthusiastic. There are plenty of good men in this world trying to do the right thing, I think to myself.

As I smugly settle in for the evening, my wife expresses the wish to see a movie. "Which one?" I ask her.

"The First Wives Club."

Well, that's another story. □

Peter Feuerherd *is assistant editor of the* Long Island Catholic *and national affairs writer for the* National Catholic Register.

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